

THE JEWELLED LIZARD











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He took a good grip with his right hand.

By W. DINGWALL FORDYCE

The Jewelled Lizard

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THE JEWELLED LIZARD.

CHAPTER I.

THE FINDING OF THE LIZARD.

“**T**HERE! I’ll give you one dollar to divide amongst yourselves;” and Stanley Linward flung the coin into the sampan, and swung himself up the ladder and on to the deck of the *Avagee*.

“You’re very free with your cash, young fellow,” said a short, red-haired man who was leaning over the side, clad in a dirty white drill suit; “twenty cents would have paid the lot, and well too!”

“I didn’t know how much they should get,” confessed Stanley, “and I was only too glad to get rid of them. Look! even now they are coming after me.” He pointed, as he spoke, to the ladder, up which two of the black Kling boatmen were clambering, naked but for a loin cloth.

“I’ll settle the impudent beggars,” said the red-

haired man, opening on the offending natives with a volley of Malay which seemed to stagger them.

The couple on the ladder halted, and finally retreated to their sampan, which put off for the shore, followed by the shouts and jeers of all the surrounding natives.

"Thank you awfully," exclaimed Stanley, much relieved; "these men have pestered me ever since I landed from the *China*, and seemed to look upon me and my luggage as their lawful prey. I hope you are to be a fellow-passenger to Belawen, Mr.—"

"Richards—Robert Richards," said the red-haired man, with an important air, "chief engineer of the *Avagee*. You may have heard of my name?"

"No—o," admitted the boy reluctantly, blushing at his mistake, and wishing he could have said "yes."
"My name is Stanley Linward."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Linward," said the engineer, shaking hands formally. "Yes, sir, I am Richards of Birmingham, champion swimmer, boxer—" Here a swarthy Javanese, clothed in greasy rags, approached and addressed the champion in Malay. "Excuse me," said Mr. Richards, turning to Stanley; "I am wanted in the engine-room, but we shall meet again at dinner."

He went forward with his assistant, and Stanley found his way below; and coming across a Chinese steward who spoke broken English, was shown into his stuffy little cabin, in which his luggage had

already been safely stowed. After a wash and change he returned to the deck, and leaning over the side, watched the animated scene with interest.

Only sixteen years old, Stanley stood five feet ten inches in height; and, indeed, it was the remarkable rapidity of his growth that was responsible for his presence in the East. The old family doctor had looked grave when the boy had developed a nasty cough, and had told Mrs. Linward plainly that a long sea voyage was absolutely essential for her son's health. With her husband's illness and recent death vividly in her mind, Mrs. Linward had written a long letter to her brother Ralph, explaining the circumstances and her inability to raise funds for such an expensive cure. Her brother, manager of a large tobacco estate in Sumatra, had cabled to send the boy out to him, at the same time undertaking all expenses. The parting had been a sorrowful one, but Stanley realized that his own future and the comfort of his mother and little sister Agnes depended on his health, and so did his best to keep a brave face and stout heart.

The long voyage out in the bracing sea air had worked wonders, and few would have recognized the boy who had left London, pale and sickly, in the bronzed, sturdy lad who boarded the *Avagee* at Penang on the last stage of the journey to Sumatra.

After the great P. and O. liner *China*, the *Avagee* seemed small and insignificant. It was a dirty little boat, owned by a Chinese syndicate, and ran between Penang and Belawen, a port on the north-east coast of Sumatra, conveying chiefly the lower-class Chinese tradesmen and coolies. The forward deck—separated by a single plank from the after deck, which was reserved for white passengers—was entirely given over to these gentry. Already the whole place swarmed with them and their big, round baskets of cackling hens and quacking ducks, but a steady stream still kept pouring in from the innumerable sampans surrounding the ship. The noise was deafening as each man fought his way on deck, while the native boatmen shouted and quarrelled amongst themselves and their fares.

As Stanley watched the busy scene, his gaze fell on a Chinaman standing immediately at the top of the companion ladder. Dressed in the usual loose Chinese trousers and jacket, he appeared of a sturdier build than the average coolie, and held his place despite the jostling of his neighbours. His back was turned towards the English lad, but as the latter looked on idly the crowd behind surged forward against the man. Instantly he swung round with a fierce gesture, scowling at the offenders, who quailed visibly under his gaze.

And well they might, for a more repulsive-looking villain it would have been hard to find. The low, receding forehead, high cheek-bones, and cruel mouth were accentuated by a hideous scar across the left side of the face. But above all it was the evil, vindictive gleam in the slanting eyes that made Stanley shudder involuntarily. Regaining his post at the top of the ladder, the fellow remained stationary, and appeared to scan each new arrival in an eager, anxious manner. As time wore on and the sampans departed, he became restless, and when the warning bell rang, seemed to be on the point of leaving the vessel. As he stepped on to the ladder, however, a sampan dashed out from under the lee of a neighbouring steamer and made for the *Avagee*. After a hurried glance at its occupants, the truculent-looking coolie made for the deck again, and mixing with the swaying throng was speedily lost to sight.

The newcomer, a Chinaman who appeared of a better class than the other passengers, climbed quickly on deck, and mingled with the crowd as though anxious to escape observation. Almost immediately the captain's bell rang, the engines commenced to throb, and the *Avagee* slipped from her moorings. Down the shallow neck of water she headed between the island of Penang and the Malay Peninsula, and Stanley scanned the island with great interest as it

glided past. The gleaming white buildings of the town of Penang soon gave place to scattered dwellings and groves of cocoanut trees. Here a stolid, grave-faced Chinaman would be tilling his ground with a huge, lazy-going buffalo attached to his antiquated plough. There, a merry group of naked, chocolate-coloured Malay children would be splashing about, enjoying themselves in the sea. As the lighthouse at the southern extremity of the island was passed, the helm was put round and a more easterly course laid for far-away Sumatra. The bell rang "full speed ahead," and Mr. Richards responded with what he afterwards proudly told Stanley was "quite ten knots an hour, sir!" The sea was calm, and the little steamer ploughed her way fussily through the warm blue water, leaving a creamy trail in her wake.

Feeling rather lonely, Stanley fixed his field glasses on a saucy steam yacht rapidly approaching, from which the strains of a band could be heard. As the two ships came abreast of each other the *Avagee's* captain, a Dane called Hastrup, hurried aft, and with his own hands dipped the Red Ensign in salute, an act which was immediately acknowledged by the yacht as she swept on towards Penang.

"Governor's yacht *Sappho*," said Captain Hastrup, nodding towards that vessel; "the Governor is evidently going to Penang for the races."

"Where has she come from?" inquired Stanley.

"Singapore. Fine yacht the *Sappho*, but a bit top heavy in a stiff gale. Finding the time hang on your hands, eh?"

"A little," Stanley confessed; "you see—"

"Oh, I know what you mean," replied the captain, laughing—"this is not a P. and O. liner, nor are there nice young ladies to play games with. We have a set of deck quoits somewhere; but for myself chess is the only game I really care for."

"Chess!" exclaimed Stanley. "My father taught me chess when I was quite a little chap. He was a very good player."

"Capital. We'll have a game, though it's ages since I played last.—Boy!" and to the steward who came running up he gave some orders in Malay.—"Have you picked up any Malay yet?" the captain asked Stanley, when a small table had been brought forward and they were busily engaged in setting out the pieces.

"Just a few words. I'm afraid I'm not very quick at languages."

"Oh, it will come all right," said Captain Hastrup confidently, "once you are away by yourself and have to speak it. Now then, left or right?"

"Left!"

The white men, with the first move, fell to the captain's lot, and soon the game was in full swing.

Both players were out of practice and made mistakes ; but gradually Stanley gained the upper hand, and victory was in sight when a cute move by his opponent ensured a draw.

"Stalemate!" cried the captain, chuckling. "A capital game, and you pressed me hard. Too late for another ; it's near six, and the sun is setting. Look there !" he went on, pointing astern ; "that is the last of Penang. The next land you see will be Sumatra."

Following the direction of the speaker's arm, Stanley made out a small speck on the horizon, and expressed his surprise that the island should still be visible.

"That is the Hill you see," explained his companion. "It is over two thousand feet high, and I hope it will be a long time before you make its closer acquaintance. All the poor fellows who have had fever are sent up there to recruit when they come out of the hospital. Now I must go on to the bridge for a bit. If you have no objection, we shall have dinner on deck to-night. It is going to be a fine evening, and the cabin is very stuffy."

Stanley was only too pleased with this arrangement, and the captain went forward. Darkness fell with astonishing rapidity, and lamps were lit throughout the ship. Two white-robed Chinese stewards appeared with a table, and proceeded to lay it out for dinner, gliding noiselessly to and fro with bare feet.

For the most part the men were silent, but occasionally they would interchange some jerky, guttural sentences in their own language. Three chairs were placed, and when everything was ready a small hand bell was rung. It had occurred to Stanley that he might be expected to change his flannel suit, but the appearance of Captain Hastrup dispelled this idea. The latter took his place just as he came off duty, in flannel shirt, duck trousers, and feet thrust into bedroom slippers. As they started on the soup Mr. Richards the engineer appeared in a fresh drill suit, with his red hair carefully greased, and nodding briefly, drew in his chair.

Stanley kept on pinching himself to make sure the whole scene was not merely a day dream, from which he would wake up presently to find himself at home in England. The steady swish of the water against the ship and the vibration of the engines were the only indications that they were out on the open sea far away from any land. The moon had not yet risen, and the dense tropical darkness enveloped the vessel as in a shroud, and threw up in strong relief the well-lit deck with the ghostly Chinese boys flitting to and fro. A subdued murmur of voices came from the fore deck, where the coolies were enjoying their evening meal of rice and fish ; and an occasional cackle would betray the presence of the unseen merchandise.

"Seems a bit strange?" said the captain, turning to the lad after some professional remarks addressed to his engineer. "It strikes most people that way at first. You'll be quite accustomed to it, however, before you have been long in Sumatra."

"It does seem queer," admitted Stanley, rousing himself, "but I only hope I shall have the chance of trying it for some time."

Feeling more at home with his two friends, the lad went on to explain the reason of his voyage, and ended by stating that it was his great ambition to become a planter.

"So you're a nephew of Mr. Manson of Bekoeda!" said Captain Hastrup. "I know him well, and have stayed a week-end at his house. You'll find planting a hard life, but there's no doubt it's a paying one if you keep your health. Fever is the great drawback. We often take patients across to Penang Hospital for a change of air. But your uncle looks well after his men, who are certainly a fine, strapping lot of young fellows."

"Oh, do you know them? Can you tell me about them?" asked Stanley eagerly.

"It is not six weeks ago since we had young Gardner, one of the assistants, on this boat. He had been spending three weeks' holidays at Singapore and Penang. Ask Mr. Richards what he thought of him," added the speaker, with a sly wink.

"He took me at a disadvantage," protested the engineer. "He was in the best of training, and I was soft with living on board ship."

"That may be quite true," said the old Dane, chuckling. "You must know," he went on, with a solemn air and another wink to Stanley, "that Mr. Richards has a great reputation round about here for running, boxing, and all that sort of thing. Mr. Gardner heard of this, and the evening before we sailed from Penang he came down, and challenged our friend here to a race round the golf course and a boxing match afterwards. I don't know how much he won the race by, but when the two came on board next day Mr. Richards had a black eye and swelled nose, while Mr. Gardner looked as fresh as paint."

"I would have won the race if I had not tripped," said the engineer sullenly, as he peeled a banana, "and he hadn't the rudiments of boxing, though he slogged very hard. He knocked out Elwell first round the same evening."

"Poor Elwell," said Captain Hastrup gravely, "he went to his death the same week. That is one thing in which I admire you British so much. If a murder like that had happened under your rule, the murderer would be brought to book however long it took. But these Dutch—"

"What happened to Elwell? Was he murdered?" inquired Stanley.

"Yes, murdered, and on his own ship. He was captain of a small steamer trading along the north-east coast of Sumatra. The *Hokwei* was carrying a cargo of rifles and ammunition to a Dutch force up in Achin, and Elwell was warned not to take any Achinese passengers, or else to keep them in irons during the voyage. He put in at Blankahan, and there a small party of Achinese, four men and two women, came on board. The men were searched and put in irons; but Elwell—being British—never dreamt of searching the women, who were left at liberty, with *krises* concealed under their *sarongs*. The same night, while Elwell and his chief engineer, the only two Europeans, were at dinner, they were surprised by the Achinese, who had been released by their women. Of course the British Government made representations to the Dutch, who replied that it was evident that Elwell had been what you call 'gun running' with the Achinese! No doubt they will make a great show of doing something, but there the matter will end."

"But hadn't they revolvers?" asked Stanley.

The two men laughed.

"All the young fellows when they first come out hug a revolver, and grab it when they see a black

face. You have one? Ah! I thought so. Well, you will find, after you have been out here some time, that you will give up carrying it. Europeans hardly ever carry one, though up-country in Sumatra it is quite a wise precaution to have one handy at night. Things are wild and exciting east of Suez, but not nearly so dreadful as they are painted. The natives fight and run *amok* amongst themselves, especially the Chinese coolies; white men, however, are seldom attacked. But now, if you have finished, come up with me on to the bridge and get a breath of fresh air."

Mr. Richards rose and said "Good-night;" and following the captain, Stanley crossed the plank on to the fore deck. Here and there a lamp threw a fitful light, but it was with some difficulty that the lad threaded his way through the crowd of sleeping figures stretched out in every direction on the bare deck.

On the little bridge the air was deliciously soft and cool, and the scene was one of great beauty. Away on the eastern horizon the young moon was rising, shedding a pale, white glimmer over the rippling sea, while ever and anon fitful flashes of summer lightning lit up the starry heavens. Even the grizzled old sea captain seemed to feel the witchery of the silent spell, and opened up long-closed chapters of his eventful life to his eager listener. Many a stirring tale of adventure under

the Southern Cross which gleamed above them, many a sad story of brilliant lives wasted, he told with rough pathos, alluding once more to Captain Elwell, who had been one of his oldest friends.

"Where is Blankahan?" asked Stanley, gazing out over the peaceful, starlit ocean, and in imagination calling up the tragic scene.

"Over there, not sixty miles away," answered the Dane, pointing a little north of their course. "But come, you must forgive an old man's love of dwelling on the past, when all your thoughts and hopes lie in the future. It is after four bells already, and sleep is the best tonic for a growing lad. Don't let my dismal reminiscences disturb your rest. To-morrow, when you wake, we shall be off the coast of Sumatra. Good-night!"

Stanley shook the proffered hand heartily, and regaining the deck, made his way aft. Carefully he stepped through the crowd of sleepers, but as he reached the connecting plank he almost stumbled against a figure which lay under the rail at the side, half hidden in the shadow. As he recovered himself a bright glare of lightning lit up the features of the sleeping man, and immediately the boy recognized him as the late arrival, now resting quietly, with his right hand closed tightly over some object.

Having regained his cabin, it was the work of a

few minutes to throw off his clothes, don his pyjamas, and jump into his bunk. But sleep refused to come. The strange loneliness of the surroundings and the remembrance of the wild tales he had just heard—in particular the tragedy of the *Hokwei*—seemed to stimulate his brain and banish all inclination to slumber. For some time the lad lay tossing uneasily, and at last, unable to endure the stuffy atmosphere any longer, he rose, and slipping his feet into a soft pair of shoes, made his way quietly on deck. Unwilling to disturb Captain Hastrup again, he crossed to the side of the after deck, and leaning on the rail, stood drinking in the cool breeze. The soft swish of the water against the ship acted soothingly on his nerves, and lulled by the sound, it was not long before his head began to nod. Rousing himself, he turned, and was about to descend when a slight rustle close by attracted his attention. The sound came from the fore deck, just across the plank, and as the boy looked in that direction it seemed to him as though the Chinaman whom he had tripped over had awakened and raised himself into a sitting posture. The moon was just emerging from behind a cloud, and as the fleecy film drew away and the light strengthened, young Linward noticed that a dark form was stooping over the sleeping man, who still lay prostrate on the deck. What there was in this to make the lad's

heart beat more quickly he could not have told, but suddenly, as he gazed intently, there came a startled exclamation, and next instant the dark figures swayed to and fro as though locked in a deadly struggle. An arm rose quickly with a glitter of bright steel; the dull thud of a heavy blow followed, and a piercing scream rent the quiet night, chilling the lad with a nameless terror, and echoing far out over the empty sea. Ah! what a cry! As it died away a form rose convulsively, staggered to the side with arms outstretched and dropped something overboard. Then with a low moan the stricken man fell heavily to the deck, huddled and inert.

Horror-struck, Stanley stood for a moment as if he had lost the power to move, then with a hoarse shout of "Help!" he leapt forward across the plank. As he did so, a shadowy form snatched up a paper which had fluttered to the deck, and glided forward, to mingle with the crowd of excited natives who had been aroused.

Lights flashed here and there, and even as he reached the fatal spot Stanley found Captain Hastrup at his side, cool and collected as ever.

"Keep back these coolies," called the skipper to Richards, who came hurrying up, "and clap the first man that moves into irons.—Now," he continued, turning to Stanley, while the engineer repeated his orders

in Malay, "hold the light while I examine this fellow, and tell me anything you know about the affair."

Stanley's hands trembled as he took the lamp, but the sight of the other's coolness and presence of mind braced his nerves. He could not repress a shudder, however, when the captain, bending down and turning the still, limp figure over on its back, exposed the ghastly white face.

"Nothing to be done here," said Hastrup, rising after a brief examination; "the poor fellow is dead. See! here is the wound right over his heart."

Stanley, sick and faint, averted his gaze from the gruesome sight, while the skipper, calling up two of the stewards, gave instructions for the body to be carried below. The brief interval gave the lad time to pull himself together, and he felt more sure of himself when Captain Hastrup turned to him again.

"What was that you were saying about a coolie with a scar?" asked the latter. "Did you actually see the face of the man who was bending over this chap?"

"No," replied the lad; "his back was towards me. It was early in the afternoon that I noticed the coolie with a scar watching him; but I'll tell you again all I saw."

"Humph! not much to go on," remarked the captain, when Stanley had finished his story; "and I'm afraid the scoundrel, whoever he is, has been too

clever to leave any trace. However, give me the lamp, and we'll go and have a look at your friend with the scar."

Accompanied by Mr. Richards they went forward, turning the lamp on the scores of yellow faces on all sides, till at last, almost hidden amongst the crates of live stock, they came upon their man.

"No mistaking that face," said the engineer, as the light fell on the Chinaman's evil countenance, showing up the hideous scar; "he looks fit for any number of murders."

"Get his *lipas*, and I'll look over it while you examine his hands and clothes," said the captain; and then, as a dirty paper was handed to him, he explained to Stanley that every native or coolie on entering Dutch territory must produce a *lipas* or pass, on demand, on pain of imprisonment. "This is all right," he continued, glancing at the paper: "'Mah Peng, boy' (fancy any one having a boy like that!), 'height five feet seven inches, age twenty-eight years, scar on left cheek.' Any marks of blood on him, Mr. Richards?"

"Not a sign that I can see."

"The murderer picked up a paper," suggested Stanley.

"Feel his clothes for a paper, Mr. Richards."

Once again the engineer searched the fellow, even

more carefully than before, but only to report that nothing was to be found.

"I thought as much," grunted the captain coolly ; "these fellows are up to every trick, and there is no catching them." He addressed a few abrupt questions to Mah Peng and the coolies round about, to which they returned instant replies, their inscrutable faces remaining as impassive as ever.

"No good," said the skipper, at last—"nothing to be got out of them except a pack of lies ; and they all swear that Mah Peng has never moved out of his place. Now, Mr. Linward, the best thing you can do is to try and forget all about this unpleasant business, and go and turn in. If you feel nervous about being alone, you can come up on the bridge with me ; but I assure you there is no cause for alarm, and the whole thing is probably the outcome of some stupid coolie quarrel. When you've been in the East as long as I have, you won't think much of an affair of this kind."

Stanley hesitated. He had naturally been much upset by his startling introduction to the methods of the Asiatic, and felt little inclination for sleep ; but his courage seemed called in question, and he was ashamed to belie his British blood. So, declining the captain's offer of companionship, with a curt "Good-night" he turned and made for his cabin.

Mr. Richards had gone below, and most of the native passengers were already asleep, with the callous indifference of their race. As he picked his way once more through the maze of slumbering figures Stanley found himself opposite the place where the poor Chinaman had met his death, and some strange impulse drew him to the scene. A dark red stain on the planking was all that marked the tragic spot, and with a shudder the lad averted his eyes. Standing by the rail, he recalled the cold-blooded murder he had unwillingly witnessed, and fell to wondering what could have been the object of the crime. Revenge seemed the most likely reason, for the dead man was possessed, apparently, of no valuables. The paper which had been stolen by the assailant might certainly be of importance, but beyond that—stay! what was it that the dying man had flung overboard? Here, indeed, might be the key to the mystery. But if that was so, the clue lay buried fathoms deep beneath the silent sea. With a last glance at the dancing waters Stanley turned to go, and as he did so his eye caught the sparkle of something on the side of the ship. It disappeared as he moved, but again his eye caught the glitter, coming apparently from a tangle of ropes dangling over the side. What was it? Could this possibly be the very clue he was seeking? The boy's hands trembled

with excitement as he leant over and strove vainly to reach the object. The distance was too great, and a second attempt was no more successful. There was only one thing for it. He glanced round the deck, and all seemed quiet. The *Avagee* was steaming steadily with scarcely a tremor, and the next instant the lad was over the rail. Lowering himself to the full stretch of his arms, he took a good grip with his right hand and let go with his left, groping for the ropes. The seconds span into hours as he hung swaying above the hungry sea, and the strain on his right arm was tremendous. Suddenly his fingers encountered a small, cold object sticking between the ropes. With a wrench he pulled it free, and placing it between his teeth, slowly hauled himself up the vessel's side, till, panting and exhausted, he topped the rail and dropped down upon the deck. Allowing himself but a moment in which to recover breath, he proceeded to examine his prize. It appeared to be the rude imitation of a lizard carved in stone, and the sparkle was caused by a large jewel placed in the head. The stone flashed and glinted in the moonlight, and Stanley gave a gasp of astonishment and wonder. A low chuckle of triumph made him start and wheel round. His blood ran cold with a sudden chill of fear, for there—not three yards away—crouched the evil-faced Mah Peng!

CHAPTER II.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

FOR a moment the two faced each other, Stanley too startled to make a movement, the Chinaman with his eyes fixed greedily on the object in the English lad's hand. The jewel flashed in the lamp-light, and the coolie crouched as though preparing to spring. This action seemed to rouse Stanley to a sense of his danger, and thrusting the lizard into his pocket he braced himself to meet the attack. Conscious that his opponent was probably armed, he was on the point of calling for help, when Mah Peng suddenly drew back and vanished as unexpectedly as he had appeared.

So quiet and cat-like were his movements that Stanley stood irresolute, peering into space for some little time before he realized that the man had actually gone. His first thought was to seek the captain and report the whole matter to him; but Mah Peng was lurking in the shadows of the fore deck somewhere, and might attack him unawares

as he made his way to the bridge. Even if he succeeded in eluding his wily adversary, he could bring no direct accusation against the Chinaman, whose movements had been merely suspicious. Captain Hastrup might think him unduly nervous; and the idea of being laughed at was not pleasant.

With a hasty glance round the deck the lad stepped forward, and crossing the plank, ran quickly down the companion and into the saloon. Here all was strangely still and quiet. A swinging lamp was burning dimly, emitting an evil odour of smoke and oil, and by its light he groped his way along one of the little passages, and entered the second cabin on the left. Closing the door hurriedly he turned up the light in the little lamp above the washstand. Everything appeared as he had left it a short time before. The tiny porthole was open, and the cool night breeze was now blowing gently in. A feeling of drowsiness came over the boy; but ere lying down he pulled out a box from his trunk, and unlocking it, took out a beautiful new Webley revolver, the parting gift of a few school friends. Slipping in six cartridges he placed the weapon under his pillow, and sought his bunk with an added sense of security.

He did not remain long awake, and for a time slept soundly enough; but gradually dreams commenced to flit across his mind, and carried him in

thought far away home to England. It seemed to him that the holidays were at an end, and having said "good-bye" to his mother he was now in the train returning to school. He knew it must be the train, from the swaying motion and the rhythmic clanking of the wheels. A gentleman opposite was the only other occupant of the carriage, and appeared to be dozing. The train rushed into a long, dark tunnel—so long that Stanley began to think it would never end. At last with a roar the train shot out again into daylight, and to his surprise he noticed that the man opposite was leaning forward grinning at him. As he looked, the face of the stranger changed to a yellow hue, the eyes grew narrow and slanting, and a scar gradually appeared across one of the cheeks. It was Mah Peng! Stanley knew him now, and had risen with a yell to pull the communication cord, when the whole scene vanished, and he found himself in his old dormitory preparing for bed. All his school companions had already retired, and it was not long before he had followed their example. But all the time, though he knew not why, a vague terror possessed him, a presentiment of coming evil, which he could not explain, but which caused him presently to open his eyes and gaze fearfully round the room. A bright moon was shedding a pale light through the

window opposite, and to his horror Stanley made out the form of a huge lizard crawling towards his bed, its solitary eye gleaming menacingly as it advanced upon him. Fear paralyzed his limbs and held him powerless. He strove to call his sleeping companions, but his parched tongue refused its office. Again and again he tried, till at last with a supreme effort he raised a shout for help—and with the cry upon his lips he awoke.

The lamp was still burning brightly, the light flickering now and again as the soft breeze reached it from the open porthole. The swish of the water and the steady beat of the engines recalled Stanley to his surroundings, and as he listened he heard three bells strike. One, two, three! and then once again the same heavy silence. The dancing light offended his sleepy eyes, and he half raised himself to extinguish the lamp. He was in the act of doing so when, with hand outstretched, he paused, listening. Again the same queer noise fell upon his ear—a soft rustling, difficult to locate.

The sound seemed to come from the passage outside, and as the lad looked towards the door his heart gave a great bound, for he distinctly saw the handle turn. Softly and quietly it moved round, and the whole door shook, as though a weight had been cautiously applied to it. The bolt held firmly, and

the pressure relaxed. Something more dangerous and deadly than a rat—which had been his first thought—had been attracted to his cabin, and Stanley's thoughts at once flew to Mah Peng.

If, indeed, he had been the perpetrator of the brutal murder a few hours previously, he would doubtless strive to obtain what had evidently been the object of his cold-blooded crime, and the young English lad realized fully the dangerous position in which he had placed himself. During his brief sleep his stealthy foe must have crept aft with the object of entering his cabin and stealing the lizard. Once inside the saloon, the Chinaman would be safe from observation, and free to carry out his evil designs.

Stanley's heart beat rapidly as his mind took in these details, and a quiver of excitement thrilled him as he waited for the next move in the attack. Slipping his right hand under the pillow he grasped the loaded revolver, thankful to have such a weapon, but reluctant to use it except as a last resort.

A cautious movement in the passage warned him that his unwelcome visitor had not retired, and he held his breath in anticipation. There came a slight fumbling at the handle, and then a thin point of steel was inserted, evidently with the intention of forcing back the lock. The door of the little cabin certainly boasted a key-hole, but the key had long

since been lost, and the bolt was the only means of security. Against it the dagger was useless, and Stanley, leaning over, watched his assailant's futile attempts to force an entrance. Once the blade was thrust viciously through right up to the hilt, as though the owner had lost his temper at repeated failures; and as the cruel steel projected close under his gaze, the English boy shuddered as it flashed across his mind that this, perhaps, was the very weapon which had already been used with such fatal effect that same night. The thought unnerved him; his blood ran cold, and as the blade was withdrawn and silence shrouded the movements of his unseen foe damp beads of perspiration broke out on his forehead. Surely the wretch would withdraw after his repeated failures to effect an entrance! For a space, indeed, it seemed as though such were really the case, but the sudden rasping of metal on metal dispelled the lad's hopes and served to increase his alarm. The wily foe had located the fastening, and was now proceeding to file the bolt. Should it give— Already the iron bar gleamed brightly where the sharp teeth of the file had cut their way, and now or never was the time for action.

Any one who had dwelt some time in the East would have fired first and made inquiries later; but Stanley was loth to shoot without due warning,

even to one whom he had good cause to suspect of murderous designs. Twice, as in his dream, he strove to call, but his lips were dry and his throat strangely parched, and when at last the words came his voice sounded unfamiliar to his own ears.

"Stand back, or I fire!" he called hoarsely in English.

The grating sound stopped, but almost immediately the door creaked and shook under steadily applied pressure. Trembling with excitement Stanley raised his revolver and cocked it. The sharp click of the mechanism must have been plainly heard out in the passage, and produced an instantaneous effect. The strain on the door ceased at once, and light footsteps indicated the retreat of the intruder down the passage—some one unacquainted with English, but evidently familiar with firearms. Young Linward heaved a great sigh of relief, and his courage returned with confidence in the power of his weapon. He settled himself more comfortably in his bunk, and waited for what might happen next.

Slowly the minutes passed, and the silence remained unbroken. Not a sound disturbed the stillness of the night save the lap, lapping of the water and the dull throb of the engines. The lad's eyes closed involuntarily, the hand holding the revolver gradually relaxed its grasp, his head sank slowly back on

the pillow, and overcome with fatigue and the heavy sea air, he fell asleep almost immediately.

Bump, bump, bump! He sprang up, wide-awake and alert with the shock. Daylight was streaming in at the porthole, and the night was past. The captain's bell rang sharply from the bridge, and the engines stopped, obedient to the command. Voices could be heard calling, and pattering footsteps echoed on the deck overhead. Stanley gazed about him in bewilderment—at the lamp just flickering out, and the revolver lying by his side. With the warm sunlight pouring into the cabin the events of the past night seemed far away and unreal; but suddenly his gaze fell on the mark made by the file on the bolt, and he realized in a flash that the encounter had been only too real. Looking at his watch he could hardly believe that the hands pointed to six.

Six o'clock! He must have slept for hours. Dressing hastily, he bundled his belongings into the trunk, which he locked, and then opening the door cautiously he peered out. Not a soul was in sight, but from the noise coming aft it was evident that the fore-deck passengers were awake and stirring. Hurrying quickly down the passage and across the saloon, Stanley ran up the companion ladder on to the deck.

Here the tumult was deafening. Coolies were shouting and jostling as they looked out their

own particular belongings, while the live stock, huddled together in the swinging baskets, added their voices to the general hubbub. The *Avagee* lay motionless on the water within sight of her destination, for barely two miles away lay the long, low coast of Sumatra. A thick, white, fever-laden mist, rising from the dense, olive-green vegetation which came right down to the sea, hid the nature of the inland, but young Linward gazed with eager eyes at the little fringe of land visible, beyond which lay the goal of his ambition.

"Good-morning, Mr. Linward," said a voice at his elbow; and turning round he beheld the engineer.

"Good-morning, Mr. Richards," he replied, holding out his hand. "Can you tell me why we have stopped? Has anything gone wrong?"

"There is nothing amiss with the ship, but the tide is not full enough to enable us to cross the bar. We touched it when we tried just now, but another twenty minutes or so will see us over."

"Oh, that would account for the bumping that awakened me. I couldn't make out what it was."

"Yes, that's been it. Now, if you will excuse my rig out," said Mr. Richards, looking down at his soiled garments, "I think we might have breakfast. Captain Hastrup is having a nap, and I must go on duty the moment his bell rings.—Boy!"

The Chinese steward came running at his call, and the two Europeans seated themselves at the table already laid out on deck. Stanley was far too excited to eat much, his whole thoughts being taken up with the strange land he was about to make his home. He plied the engineer with questions about Sumatra, its customs and inhabitants, until Mr. Richards was fain to confess that he knew little about them.

"You see, I don't get much ashore," he explained apologetically. "Thirty-six hours after arriving at Belawen we are off again, and as I can't speak Dutch—it's a beastly language—I just stay on the ship."

"I see," said Stanley, a little disappointed. "Why on earth are these fellows making such a row?" he added, as the tumult increased in vehemence.

"Just their little way," replied his companion, with a careless glance at the seething throng; "they always get excited at landing. No doubt, also, they are discussing the murder last night. If the Dutch take the matter up at all they will probably send a spy amongst them, who will soon get at the truth; but most likely, seeing it is only a coolie, they will take no notice officially. At least, they have never done so yet in any similar case I have heard of."

"Oh, did you find out who the poor fellow was, or anything about him?" asked Stanley eagerly.

“His *lipas* describes him as being employed with Swee Boo and Co., the big Chinese firm of store-keepers in Medan. He seems to have had no luggage except the usual opium pipe and a few other odds and ends.”

“I wonder—” Stanley said, and then stopped short.

He had been on the point of telling his companion about his discovery of the previous night and its sequel, but Mr. Richards hardly seemed a suitable confidant, and his little, close-set, watery blue eyes had a crafty, greedy look which was not inviting.

“Yes?” queried the engineer, helping himself to another slice of toast; and then, getting no reply, he went on impressively, “No doubt you are wondering at the captain’s story about Mr. Gardner and myself. Is that not so?”

“Oh—ah—yes, of course,” stammered the lad, glad that the conversation had been turned.

“And very naturally,” went on the engineer in an aggrieved tone, “looking to my reputation and the fact that I am known in Birmingham as ‘Champion’ Richards for running, swimming, and boxing.” He glared at his companion as he made this startling statement, as though defying him to contradict the assertion. “Yes, sir, Champion Richards; and you can tell Mr. Gardner when you—” but the message of defiance was never delivered, for

at that moment the bell rang, and the "champion" hurried off munching a crust of toast.

The engines began to throb once more, and gathering way, the *Avagee* moved slowly forward towards the hidden bar of silt and sand.

Stanley felt two slight tremors as the keel grazed the top, but immediately after the speed was increased and the vessel headed for the shore.

"The captain ask you to bridge, sir," said a half-caste mate, approaching and saluting.

The lad obeyed the summons with alacrity, glancing at the scene of the night's tragedy as he went.

The captain greeted him briskly, and after a brief reference to the "disturbance," as he called it, of the previous night, pointed to the coast ahead.

"There is your first view of the 'enchanted' land. What do you think of it?"

"Splendid!" exclaimed Stanley, drawing a deep breath of astonished delight.

And, indeed, the sight was one to appeal to any boy with a sense of imagination and a love of unknown adventure. The warm rays of the sun, rising in a cloudless blue sky, had already dispersed the mist hanging over the coastline. Here and there a few fantastic wreaths were left poised in mid air, their fleecy whiteness serving all the better to show up the deep, rich tints of the background. The dark blue

waters of the straits rolled lazily up to the dank, luxuriant undergrowth fringing the coast, breaking now and then into soft, creamy waves. Behind lay miles and miles of thick, virgin jungle, silent and mysterious, with a wealth and variety of green tints to delight the eye of any painter. Far as one's gaze could reach, the mass of vegetation extended; and dotted here and there, like gigantic sentries, huge trees with tall, straight trunks and tufts of foliage towered above their lesser companions. For a long way inland the ground sloped very gently to the sea, but on the distant horizon a chain of great mountains rose majestically.

"Splendid!" repeated the boy. "It looks fit for anything. What are those great trees? And look! there is smoke coming from one of the mountains. It must be a volcano."

"Eh, what!" ejaculated the captain. "Can you see the smoke from here? You are quite right—it is a volcano; but your eyes must be very sharp to pick out the thin columns of steam at this distance. Those trees are called *twalangs*, and grow to a height of two hundred and fifty feet. Now watch me run the *Avagee* ashore." His eyes twinkled as he spoke, at the lad's look of astonishment.

By this time the vessel was close in to the land, and Stanley tried vainly to guess where she was

heading. Not a sign of docks or harbour was to be seen; and he was beginning to wonder if it was the usual custom in these parts to run ships ashore, when Captain Hastrup gave a short, sharp order, the helm was put over, and the bow of the vessel swung round into a broad stream. The thick vegetation had hidden the mouth of the river till the last moment, but now as they swept on they passed wooden huts built right out into the water, with the Malay occupants busy mending their fishing-nets. A Chinese junk, with huge lateen sail, came lumbering past on the tide, and immediately after a bend in the river disclosed all that answered to the port of Belawen.

As the *Avagee* came alongside the wharf, Stanley eagerly scanned the landing-stage for his uncle; but not a white man was to be seen, and his face fell with the disappointment.

"Expecting some one to meet you?" asked the captain. "Well, I believe that fellow there with the telegram in his hand has a message for you."

This surmise proved correct; for as soon as the gangway was run out, the half-caste messenger stepped on board, and approaching the lad inquired if his name was Linward.

"Yes; is this for me?" and tearing open the envelope Stanley read, "Detained. Take first train to Selesseh.—Manson."

CHAPTER III.

ARRIVAL AT BEKOEDA.

UPON inquiry, Stanley found that the next train was not due for two hours, the low tide having caused the *Avagee* to miss the early morning connection. He felt rather at a loss as to how he should fill in the time, but Captain Hastrup came to the rescue with a suggestion.

"I must change my clothes, and go off and report this stabbing business to the authorities," he said; "but Mr. Richards will go with you and see your box through the Customs, and then you can come back here for tiffin."

Stanley thanked him heartily, and added, "I want to speak to you about—something—that happened last night. I did not like to distract your attention on the bridge, but when you have time—"

"Yes, yes," assented the captain, hurrying off; "tell me about it when you come back. Now I'll send Mr. Richards to you;" and with a parting wave of the hand he strode away.

Leaning over the side of the vessel Stanley amused himself watching the coolies streaming on to the wharf, each man balancing a long pole across one shoulder, with a basket of live stock hanging at either end. The procession seemed endless, and he had given up counting the numbers when the engineer appeared on deck, clad in a spotless suit of white drill and with a huge solar topee on his head.

"Captain Hastrup asked me to see your box through the Customs," he said, as he came forward; "and if you are ready now, I shall tell one of the men to go with you and fetch your trunk."

Accordingly, Stanley ran down to his cabin to get his straw hat and point out his box to the native, who swung it on to his back and staggered across the gangway. The two Europeans followed, and a few minutes' walk brought them to a large shed at the end of the railway station. Here the trunk was deposited, and a half-caste official who had been loitering about came forward and addressed Mr. Richards. The engineer turned to Stanley and asked for the key, which was handed over. The trunk was then opened, and the officials, after the manner of their kind, proceeded to fling about the contents.

While the few articles which had been shoved in at the last minute were thus being carelessly tossed aside, Stanley suddenly remembered the lizard which

he had thrust into the pocket of his pyjama suit when startled by Mah Peng the night before. He stooped to feel for it, when an exclamation from one of the half castes diverted his attention. Looking up, he saw that the fellow had got hold of his revolver case and was holding it aloft triumphantly.

"There's nothing in that but my revolver," said the lad in English to his companion; "here is the key."

The engineer handed it over to the clerks, at the same time remarking, "A revolver is just what they like to make a fuss over. Every man, white or black, who brings a firearm into the country is at once suspected of being in league with the Achinese."

The case having been opened, a long conversation ensued between Mr. Richards and the two half castes. Eventually the revolver and case were put aside, the contents rammed again into the trunk, which was then locked, and the key returned.

"Just as I thought," said the engineer, as they turned away; "they insist on keeping the revolver until you get a permit from the controller. You may safely leave your box there till train time. Captain Hastrup can hardly be back yet, so, if you care, we might stroll about for a little."

He led the way as he spoke round by the back of the station towards the score of huts which constituted the native village.

"There," he said, pointing to a large white house standing amongst a clump of cocoanut trees some distance up the line, "that is the house of the Dutch official who has charge of the place. These are the huts of the natives required for looking after the wharf and railway line."

They strolled down the main "street" of the village and back again, Stanley gazing with interest at the rickety wooden houses, and the naked little brown children who were playing about. Several great, gaunt pariah dogs lay basking in the sun, and growled angrily at the Europeans as they passed. On reaching the wharf they found that the *Avagee's* cargo was being unloaded, while several trucks, laden with great square bales, stood alongside, ready for their contents to be transferred to the ship's hold.

"What are these bales?" asked Stanley.

"Tobacco," was the reply. "This is the time of year for shipping it, and every voyage we take a large cargo."

Stanley gazed eagerly at the vans with their valuable cargo of bales, and wondered if any of them happened to come from his uncle's estate.

On boarding the vessel they found the captain in the saloon with a telegram before him on the table, which had already been laid for lunch. He looked up as they entered.

"We sail with the tide at 6 p.m. to-morrow, Mr. Richards," he said; "please have everything ready by that time."

The engineer nodded, and held out his hand to young Linward. "Good-bye," he said; "I have some repairs to attend to, and shall not see you again."

The boy shook hands, at the same time thanking him for the trouble he had taken.

"Now," said Captain Hastrup, as Mr. Richards left the saloon, "come and have some tiffin, and let me hear what you have to say. Don't touch that water! It is quite unsafe. You must either take a little claret or a glass of light beer."

Stanley helped himself to a wing of cold chicken and a mouthful of claret, and proceeded to unfold his tale of the previous night's adventures. The old Dane listened attentively, putting in a shrewd question here and there, and when the story was ended, sat a while tapping his plate with a knife.

"I'm very glad you did not tell me this before," he said at last. "If I had known that an attempt had been made on a white passenger on my ship, I should have been compelled to ask the authorities to make an investigation. You would have been dragged into the business, and the *Avagee* would certainly have been detained. As it is, the Dutchman in charge here has wired to Swee Boo to arrange for

the dead coolie's burial, and no more will be heard of the matter."

"But the lizard, the thing I found sticking in the ropes!" exclaimed Stanley—"should I not hand it over to the man's employers or relations?"

The captain laughed. "To tell you the truth," he said, "I don't believe much in this wonderful jewel of yours."

"But it was a beautiful diamond," protested the lad indignantly, "as big as—as—"

"An egg, eh? Sham diamonds often are."

"Mah Peng seemed to know its value!"

"That is true; but very likely the thing is some sacred joss or fetish that may seem very valuable to a Chinaman, but utter rubbish to any one else. However, let me see the lizard, and I'll be able to judge better."

Too late Stanley remembered that his wonderful find was lying in his trunk at the station, and in a few words explained the circumstances to the captain, who did not seem in the least disappointed.

"Never mind," he said cheerfully; "don't you worry about it. It is most unlikely that the jewel is genuine. Simple coolies don't usually carry diamonds as big as eggs about with them. All the same, I should advise you to keep clear of Mah Peng. There seems little doubt from what you say that the

fellow made a bare-faced attempt to enter your cabin last night, though I hardly fancy your life was in danger. Chinamen will risk a lot for what they consider a joss, and that fellow has an evil face. There is the train whistling! You have plenty of time to walk across to the station, as it waits ten minutes before returning."

Stanley picked up his hat and held out his hand. "Good-bye, and many thanks for all your kindness."

"Good-bye, my lad," replied the Dane, shaking hands heartily. "I hope we may meet again. Good-bye and good luck!"

As Stanley crossed the gangway the train steamed into the station. He went first to the shed where his trunk had been left, but found that it had already been placed in the van. The station was crowded with the coolies who had crossed on the *Avagee*, and it was with difficulty that he made his way to the booking-office.

"Selesseh," he said to the booking-clerk, who answered something in Malay. Stanley nodded his head, repeating "Selesseh," and picking up his change and ticket, turned to go. As he did so it seemed to him that he caught a momentary glimpse of an evil, scarred face close by with a look of malicious triumph in the slanting eyes, and immediately it flashed across his mind that he had been guilty of an

indiscretion in announcing his destination so publicly. The jostling crowd intervened, and when he looked again, the figure he sought had disappeared. Cursing himself for his stupidity, the lad realized now more clearly than ever that Mah Peng was quite determined to recover the joss, and would certainly prove a dangerous and unscrupulous antagonist.

With these thoughts in his mind Stanley made his way to the train, and having noticed a large 2 on his ticket, clambered into a second-class carriage. The coolies were crowded into the third-class compartments, and he concluded that the first and second were reserved for Europeans. Just before the train started, however, two Chinamen, who from their dress were evidently wealthy merchants, entered his compartment, at the same time eyeing him with a thinly-veiled look of surprise. The whistle sounded almost at once, and they were off. As the wharf with the *Avagee* alongside disappeared from view, Stanley felt as though the last link of the chain which bound him to the old life was being severed, and his sense of loneliness was increased by an uneasy doubt lest his movements were being shadowed.

The train rattled across a broad, sluggish river, and as it reached the farther side of the bridge two large crocodiles, startled from their sleep, scurried over the mud and plunged into the water. This sight

at once turned the current of the lad's reflections, and as he gazed out at the passing scenery his spirits rose. For some time the line lay between dense, marshy jungle on either side, but as the sea-coast was left behind the nature of the ground improved, and several plantations of cocoanut trees with dwelling-houses were passed.

After a run of half an hour or so they stopped at a little station, evidently waiting to let a down train pass. Several Europeans were waiting on the platform, and Stanley gazed curiously at them, wondering who and what they were. Most of them got into compartments at once: two, however, preferred to await the signal before taking their seats, and paced up and down outside, conversing in Dutch. Both were big men, dressed in white drill suits with large solar topees, and Stanley envied them their easy bearing and confident manner. As they passed his carriage one of them made a remark to his companion, who turned, and after a quick glance, came forward and took off his hat.

"My name is Van Holst," he said politely, in English, with a strong foreign accent, "and my friend and I we will be glad if you will come with us in our compartment."

"Thank you very much," replied the lad, pulling off his straw hat, "but I am going to Selesseh."

"Ya, Selesseh," replied the Dutchman, nodding; "we go so far with you as Medan."

Hesitating no longer, Stanley jumped down on to the platform beside his new friend. Glancing quickly along the line of carriages, he was relieved to find that no one appeared to be watching his movements. The Dutchman led the way to a first-class compartment, and as they got in, the luggage train for which they had been waiting clanked past, leaving the line ahead of them once more clear for the continuance of their journey.

"You will forgive me," began Van Holst, when they were seated, "but my friend—Mynheer Van der Beek—and I saw that you were a 'sinkey'—a new-comer to this country—and that by mistake you were in a second-class carriage. All white men here travel first class. You will excuse the liberty?"

"Oh, certainly—thank you very much," said Stanley gratefully. "The booking-clerk did say something to me at Belawen, but I did not understand what he said. My name is Stanley Linward."

Both Dutchmen bowed, and the lad felt rather embarrassed.

"I am glad to meet you," said Van Holst courteously, "and hope you will like the life in this country. You are to be a planter?"

"That is my great desire," was the reply; "at present I am on a visit to my uncle, Mr. Manson."

“Mynheer Manson of Bekoeda! I know him well. He is one of my best friends; his estate it is a fine one, and if the sultan—”

Van der Beek, who had opened a newspaper, looked up suddenly and made some remark in Dutch. Van Holst did not complete his sentence, but turning the conversation, he drew Stanley's attention to a stretch of country where a band of Chinese coolies was at work clearing away the undergrowth, and explained that they were preparing the ground for planting tobacco. The English lad looked at the busy scene with great interest, and plied his new friend with questions about the life and work of a planter. In the midst of their talk the train pulled up at a large station, and the two Dutchmen rose.

“This is Medan,” announced Van Holst, “and my friend and I we get out here. Please to give my best wishes to Mynheer Manson, your uncle. You do not need to get out. The train will soon again start for Selesseh, which is the last station on this line.”

“Good-bye,” said Stanley, shaking hands. “I shall certainly remember you to my uncle, and at the same time I shall not fail to tell him of your kindness.”

Lifting their hats the Dutchmen stepped on to the crowded platform and made their way towards the exit. Stanley was watching their retreating figures

when his eye fell on the form of a coolie advancing, and he had barely time to draw back out of sight when the ill-favoured Mah Peng came forward and halted just opposite the carriage. Pulling off his round straw hat he entered at once into conversation with a tall European who was standing with his back to the train. The conversation was carried on in Malay, and the latter appeared to be questioning the Chinaman closely about some matter. Mah Peng burst out into an excited explanation, producing a piece of paper, which his companion looked at with great interest.

By this time it was clear to the English lad that the Chinaman was under the impression that he was safely ensconced in his old compartment, and his heart beat rapidly with excitement as he realized that Mah Peng might betray himself unawares. Keeping well hidden, he strained his ears to catch what was passing, but his lack of Malay hampered him badly. Mah Peng appeared to be translating the writing on the paper, and Stanley caught the last words, "the *chic-chac* tells." After a second perusal the European put the letter carefully in his pocket, and the Chinaman went on with his story. The words "sinkey" and "Selesseh," accompanied by a cautious gesture towards the front portion of the train, left the boy no longer in doubt that the conversation referred to himself,

but his Malay was insufficient to fill up the gaps. When Mah Peng had finished, his companion stood some time thinking, and then proceeded to give some orders rapidly in a low tone. Having repeated his instructions he handed over what appeared to be bank notes, and with a parting word of caution turned abruptly away. Stanley gazed after him, hoping to catch a glimpse of his face, but he disappeared without once looking back.

Left to himself, Mah Peng proceeded to light a vile-smelling Chinese cigarette, and several times young Linward felt that his presence must surely be discovered by the coolie as he strolled leisurely up and down the platform; but at last a whistle from the engine sent the Chinaman hurrying off.

Thankful that he had escaped detection, Stanley proceeded to recall the scraps of information he had collected and piece them together. Beyond the fact that his doings and destination had been discussed he could make little of it, and the meaning of "the *chic-chac* tells" was a puzzle which he found himself totally unable to solve. Who or what was a *chic-chac*, and what was to be told? The conversation he had overheard evidently referred in some way to the incidents on board the *Avagee*, but what it all meant he could not guess.

His thoughts wandered to the coming meeting with

his uncle and the life on the estate. The train was now passing through a flat, well-watered region, and the outlying belt of swampy jungle was left behind. Coolies were at work on every side clearing the ground, while an occasional European was to be seen supervising their labours. Away on the western horizon towered the chain of mountains, the thin curling smoke from the crest of the highest being now plainly visible in the clear evening air.

The train drew up at a station, and Stanley read the name "Bindjei." Surely he had heard his uncle speak of Bindjei, but next moment they were off again. The train crossed a wooden bridge over a broad, swirling river, rushed through a belt of jungle, and emerged on more open ground, whistling loudly. As they slowed down to pass a level crossing Stanley caught a fleeting glimpse through the trees of a large white house standing back some little distance from the line, and a few minutes later the train steamed into a station.

Selesseh at last! And almost immediately the boy caught sight of his uncle, Mr. Manson, who came forward as the train drew up.

"Welcome to Bekoeda, Stanley," he said, laying his hand on the lad's shoulder. "What a great big fellow you have grown!"

When the first greetings were over they turned

to the van, and Mr. Manson directed a coolie to lift the trunk and carry it to the stationmaster's room.

"I haven't a cart to send down for it this evening," he explained, "as we have been shipping tobacco all day and the bullocks are resting; but your box will be quite safe there, and will be brought up to the house to-morrow morning. You can make shift with some of my things for the night, and they will fit you much better than I expected. Now come along, and let us get home before it is dark. Your train is late, and I did not bring lamps."

As he spoke he led the way to the exit, where a small dogcart with a fine chestnut pony between the shafts was waiting. Jumping in, Mr. Manson called to the syce to climb up behind, and after a playful buck, Brownie, the pony, settled down to a swinging trot. Just before the level crossing was reached the train rushed past on its homeward journey, and the noise of the wheels died away in the distance.

"Have we far to drive?" asked Stanley.

"No; only about a mile."

"But you told me it would be dark," said the boy, looking round in wonder.

"So it will," replied Mr. Manson, laughing. "The sun has set, and darkness comes on suddenly: there is little twilight here."

So indeed it proved, for as they turned in between two white pillars and entered the approach to the house, night had already fallen. They drove under a porch, and drew up in front of the house Stanley had noticed from the railway, and which was now ablaze with lamps.

"Here we are," said Mr. Manson, jumping down—"welcome home! Come along and I'll show you your room, and then we'll have dinner. You must be hungry."

The lad followed his uncle up the stairs through the front veranda and into a large airy room, where a clean suit of white drill was laid out in readiness for his use.

"Jump into these, and come down when you are finished," said Mr. Manson; and following his advice Stanley soon reappeared attired in his borrowed suit, and the two sat down to dinner.

Mr. Manson was eager to hear the latest news from home about all his friends and relations, and plied his nephew with questions. Tired with excitement and the long, hot journey, and lulled by the soft fanning of the punkah, Stanley's head began to nod and his answers grew short and incoherent. At length, after an unusually absurd remark, Mr. Manson took in the situation, and laughingly ordered him off to bed.

"It is too bad of me treating you like this the first night," he said, "when I have been specially warned by your mother to take the greatest care of you. I wonder what Alice would say to me if she saw you! Run away to bed and sleep sound—the boy has laid out a suit of pyjamas for you."

With a sleepy "good-night" Stanley stumbled up the stairs to his room. Speedily undressing, he turned out the lamp, and was about to jump into bed when he remembered that he had not wound his watch. The side door of his room was open, and a ray of moonlight lit up the veranda. He stepped out noiselessly on his bare feet, and was proceeding to wind his watch, when a whispered conversation below attracted his attention. Looking down over the railing he saw a dark form standing beside one of the white-robed Chinese boys. The two separated as he gazed, and the unknown visitor glided away towards a clump of trees. Turning as he passed out of sight, he waved his arm to the silent watcher below, and next moment he was gone. Too weary to ponder over the meaning of the incident, Linward threw himself into bed and soon fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LIZARD KEEPS ITS SECRET.

WHEN Stanley awoke next morning the bright sun was streaming into his room. The cackle of hens and the hum of voices came to him from outside, and he lay listening drowsily to the sound, wondering what it all meant. Little by little a recollection of his experiences came to him, and as he opened his eyes and stared out through the mosquito curtains, he realized that at last he must be at his journey's end, in his uncle's house in Sumatra. The great big bed was a luxury after bunks, however comfortable the latter might be, and the large airy room felt vast and deliciously cool after the stuffy little cabin on the *Avagee*.

Presently pattering footsteps approached along the veranda, and the double door leading into his room was swung open, letting in a perfect flood of warm sunlight. A Chinese boy, dressed in cool white, with bare feet, entered, and moved towards the bed. Seeing the young Englishman lying apparently asleep he stood

watching him for a few seconds, and then tip-toed noiselessly over to the chair upon which the tired lad had flung his clothes the previous night. Stanley watched him lazily through half-closed eyes, but suddenly sat upright, alert and wide-awake.

"Hullo! what are you doing?" he cried in English, forgetting in his excitement the little Malay he possessed; "take your hand out of my pocket!"

At the sound of his voice the Chinese boy turned quickly round, and advanced towards him saying something in Malay. Pulling aside the mosquito curtains, he held out a note which Stanley took and opened. The message, which was from his uncle, read: "I shall be back for tiffin at twelve. The boy will bring you breakfast when you want it. Don't go out into the sun without a topee."

Evidently he must have mistaken the Chinese boy's intentions; the fellow had only been going to fold his clothes after all. "Yes, yes," he said, nodding in answer to a further flow of Malay, in which he only understood the word *makan*, or food. The Chinese boy withdrew, and soon came back, bearing a tray on which was spread a tempting meal. This he placed upon a small table, which he drew up to the bedside.

Stanley did ample justice to the repast, and was just finishing his third cup of tea when the boy returned with a white drill suit of Mr. Manson's

over his arm. Depositing this on a chair, he picked up the flannel jacket and trousers, and was about to remove them when again Stanley interfered.

"No, no," he said, shaking his head and pointing peremptorily to the chair. "Put them down; I don't want them taken away."

The boy hesitated as though misunderstanding, but on a further command from young Linward, replaced the clothes on the chair and retired looking somewhat crestfallen.

"Hang it all," muttered Stanley to himself, as he jumped out of bed, "the chap seems awfully taken with my old flannel suit. Perhaps he hoped to sneak a dollar, or—whew!" and he whistled as a sudden thought flashed across his mind, "perhaps it was that jewelled lizard the beggar was after. I almost wish I had never found the wretched thing; and yet—how on earth could he know anything about it? Unless that fellow he was speaking to last night gave him a hint. Who could it have been?"

Debating the matter thus in his own mind, Linward attired himself in his uncle's clothes, which fitted wonderfully, and made him feel as if he were already almost a planter. Then transferring his few possessions to the pockets of his new suit, he sallied forth on a voyage of discovery.

The house, built entirely of wood, was laid out in the

form of a square. Down the middle of the ground floor ran a large tiled hall or dining-room, a portion in front, next the doors opening on to the porch, being screened off to form a smoking and lounging vestibule. On one side of this vestibule a door gave access to the little office, while on the other the stairs led to the flat above. On the upper floor a long apartment or drawing-room ran the whole length of the front of the house, and from either end of it the veranda was continued round the building. The four bedrooms lay in the centre of the house, each opening on to the veranda.

From the front veranda, which faced east, an extensive view was to be had of the ground immediately round the house. A large, closely-cropped tennis lawn, with four courts, lay just in front, and beyond this again, and divided from it by a bamboo hedge, stretched a broad field of coarse grass, where the cattle were wont to graze, and where also the assistants occasionally indulged in athletic sports. The main road leading from Bindjei to Bekoeda and other estates farther inland formed the southern boundary of this field, and with the Selesseh road, which joined it at right angles, bounded it on two sides. To the left as one looked out from the veranda, and just beyond the tennis lawn, stood a little wooden hut, thatched, like all the other houses, with attap leaves. This was the abode of several Sikh *oppases*, who

acted as estate messengers and policemen. Big, bearded fellows they were, in flowing robes and snowy white turbans.

For quite an hour Stanley roamed about the house prying everywhere, and was just in the middle of an exciting game of billiards, spot *versus* plain, when the sound of wheels on the gravel caused him to run out into the porch, expecting to greet his uncle. Instead he found a heavy native cart drawn by two small Siamese bullocks standing at the door. The Kling driver, attired in a scanty loin cloth, saluted the young Englishman, and indicated the trunk which he had brought from the station. With the Chinese boy's assistance, the box was carried upstairs and deposited in young Linward's room; but hardly had the lid been lifted when Stanley heard his uncle calling him from the office, and running downstairs, found him standing by his desk.

"Good-morning, lazybones," cried Mr. Manson, as his nephew appeared; "I suppose you're just up. We'll have to break you into more respectable habits shortly. Six is the proper hour for starting the day's work here, not eleven. I hope you had a good night's sleep and feel rested, my boy."

"Oh yes, Uncle Ralph, I slept like a top. But you don't mean to say you were up at six this morning?"

"Not only up but out by that hour every morning," replied Mr. Manson. "I don't like it any more than other people, but it becomes a habit after a while. If you had come out as the junior or extra assistant, as he is called, you would have to get up nearer five than six."

"Whew, what a beastly hour to rise!"

His uncle laughed. "So most of them think; but it has to be done, to rouse the natives and get them started to work. Now I must go and change, and have a tub. Have you used your bathroom yet? No? Come along then, and I'll show you the proper way to enjoy a bath."

Mr. Manson led the way as he spoke, and pushed open a door. The four bathrooms were arranged round the outside of the dining-hall, and by means of a flight of steep stairs access was gained to each of them from the corresponding bedroom above. The floor was of cement with a slight fall outwards, and built into the angle under the bedroom stairs was a cement tank full of clean cold water. A small shallow bucket with wooden handle lay on the floor.

"That's a pretty deep bath," said Stanley, eyeing the tank.

"Oh, that is only for holding the water," replied his uncle. "The whole room is really the bath. You just stand in the middle and pour the water

over yourself from this bucket—*timbak*, we call it. You will soon get to like it. Hullo!" he added, dipping the *timbak* into the water, "this is leaking very badly. I must get you another from one of the other bathrooms. You cut along and get ready for tiffin. Go round by the front and lay this letter on my desk. I put it in my pocket by mistake."

The lad was off like a shot, and as he raced up the stairs and gained the front veranda he heard his uncle shutting the bathroom door. Dashing quickly into his room, he stopped short in mute amazement at the sight of the Chinese boy bending over his open trunk. The latter rose hurriedly, and started a long explanation, which the English lad cut short by ordering him out of the room.

Taken in conjunction with the incident earlier in the morning such behaviour was certainly open to suspicion, and Stanley determined to speak to his uncle at once about the whole matter. The boy had evidently just begun his search, for only a few articles had been pulled out on to the floor. Amongst them Stanley noticed his pyjamas rolled into a ball, exactly as he had packed them at Belawen, and unfolding them he found the stone lizard still in the pocket of the jacket. At that moment a call from his uncle roused him to activity, and he had barely completed his toilet when the gong rang, and fastening the last

button as he went, he rushed downstairs and joined Mr. Manson at the table.

His uncle was still anxious for home news, and kept Stanley busy answering his questions; but after a time talk became more general, and the lad had his innings. His mind was full of doubt regarding the Chinese boy's recent actions, but he hesitated to accuse him of a deliberate attempt to steal his curio. After all, there was no proof that the fellow had any knowledge of the existence of such a thing, and his quiet, respectful attitude as he moved round the table betrayed no sign of a guilty conscience. Perhaps the incidents on board the *Avagee* had made him unduly nervous and suspicious, for on consideration there seemed no reason to believe that his imitation lizard should be an object of special attraction. At the same time he felt that it would be more prudent, so long as the boy was present, not to produce the image for Mr. Manson's inspection, and therefore confined himself to asking information concerning the life of a tobacco planter. Incidentally Mr. Manson taught him the Malay for words in everyday use, and advised him to pick up the language as fast as possible.

"I see you know one or two phrases already," he said, "and if you keep at it you will soon learn sufficient to find your way about with comfort.

There is a very handy little dictionary in the office somewhere that will help you a lot."

"Thanks very much," Stanley replied; "I want to be able to speak a bit. By-the-bye," he added, as a thought struck him, "what does *chic-chac* mean?"

"*Chic-chac!*" repeated his uncle; "look there, these are *chic-chacs*." He pointed as he spoke to the wooden partition running round the room, and Stanley eagerly followed the direction of his arm.

"These little green beasts! Why, they are lizards exactly like mine," he exclaimed excitedly.

"Like yours!" echoed his uncle, with a puzzled look. "What do you mean?"

"Oh—I'll explain about it when that chap goes," said Stanley, indicating the Chinaman with a glance. "But tell me, what can these little lizards do?"

"Do? They run about the walls of a house and eat the moths and flies. When the lamps are lit, you will notice that the *chic-chacs* gather round them to catch the insects that are attracted by the light. Now, when the fruit is on the table we shall be alone, and you can satisfy my curiosity. What will you have?"

"A banana, please; they are so much nicer than at home."

"That is only natural, seeing that here they are plucked when ripe, whereas those you get at home

are plucked unripe and left to mature during the voyage. Out here they are called *pisang*, not bananas."

With a careful look round to see that he had omitted nothing, the Chinese boy withdrew, and after a short pause Stanley began his story. Commencing at the point when his attention had been attracted to Mah Peng's restlessness before the starting of the *Avagee*, he went carefully over each incident that seemed to have a bearing on the mystery down to the discovery of the Chinese boy's apparent complicity. Mr. Manson listened thoughtfully, putting a question here and there when the narrative appeared confused ; and after his nephew had finished his story he sat silent for a minute with a puzzled frown on his brow.

"Where is this wonderful lizard?" he asked at length. "At present I am rather inclined to support Captain Hastrup's views with regard to it, but I don't quite follow the whole business."

Stanley produced the lizard from his pocket and laid it on the table in front of his uncle, who gave a low whistle of astonishment as his eyes fell on it. Picking it up, he turned to the light and examined it most carefully. The creature was fashioned after the manner of a *chic-chac*, or common little house lizard, being seven inches or so in length. It was

carved out of a greeny gray stone in clever imitation of the colour of the real animal, but instead of four legs it boasted twelve, arranged in pairs at regular intervals down the sides, and projecting straight out at right angles. Just beyond the foremost pair of legs on the right side, at the junction of the head and body, there was a peculiar bulge, in which was set the flashing stone, evidently intended to represent the creature's solitary eye; while close beside it a portion of the green stone had been left projecting in a curious fashion. Mr. Manson turned the image round and round in close scrutiny, shook it close to his ear, and finally, laying it on the table, tapped it lightly all over.

"No," he said at last, addressing his nephew, who had been eagerly following his actions, "no, I can make nothing of it just at present. There is one thing you may be sure about," he added, noting the lad's disappointed look—"this stone is genuine. I am quite certain of that, and a finer diamond for its size I have never seen."

"O Uncle Ralph, how splendid! But what are we to do with it?"

"That is just the question I am considering. You say that the Chinaman who was killed on board the *Avagee* was employed with Swee Boo and Co. of Medan? Well, in that case, if this thing belonged

to them, they will make inquiries about it at once, and we shall soon hear something from the authorities. But I am inclined to think that the man's employers knew nothing about this joss, or else they would certainly have given him instructions to hand it over to Captain Hastrup for safe keeping. Mah Peng had evidently got to hear about it somehow, and was probably going back to search for it when you forestalled him. From his attempt to enter your cabin late that night, it would appear that he either knows the value of the stone or covets the image as a joss. As to his meeting with the European at Medan and their conversation at the station"—Mr. Manson paused and regarded his nephew with a twinkle in his eye—"you know that Malay is hardly your strong point yet."

"Oh, come, that is too bad," Stanley protested.

"Well, I have tried in every way to find the meaning of 'the *chic-chac* tells,' without result. As you saw, I examined the workmanship very carefully, but could find no trace of a joint anywhere; the thing is carved solid out of the stone. There is no rattle when it is shaken nor hollow sound when it is tapped, and I have fingered it very carefully all over to make sure that there is no hidden spring. Frankly, 'the *chic-chac* tells'—nothing!"

Stanley stared gloomily at the quaint image with

its sparkling gem. His hopes had been high that his uncle would make some wonderful discovery, and his disappointment was all the keener at his verdict.

"Even if it tells nothing more, however, it may bring you a good round sum of money," said his uncle cheerfully.

"How can it do that?"

"If the lizard is not claimed by Swee Boo or the relatives of the dead coolie, which is even more unlikely, it seems to me that you have every right to keep it, and a diamond of that quality will command a large price. Now, I am going to lock it up in the safe until I can get down to Medan, and have a talk with Swee Boo. It is safer there in any case, though I feel sure you are mistaken in suspecting the boy Ah Tjew of designs upon it. I have always found him wonderfully honest."

"Yes, perhaps," said Stanley slowly; "but who was he speaking to last night?"

"I am rather inclined to be sceptical of that interview also," replied Mr. Manson, smiling; "there was no sign of a coolie at Selesseh station answering to your description of Mah Peng, and no one else has any knowledge of this lizard. Then, again, you were hardly in a state to notice things observantly when you went to bed last night, were you?"

Stanley was compelled to admit that he was not,

but was proceeding to qualify his admission when Mr. Manson interrupted him.

"Come along," he said, rising, "and we'll lock up your jewelled lizard. I don't think you need worry about Mah Peng, who is probably forty miles away at Medan, and will think twice before making any further attempt, knowing that you are on your guard. There," he went on, shutting and locking the safe, "now your mind can rest at ease. Hullo! it is one o'clock, and I have to go and inspect Gardner's division this afternoon. I must be off, but will be back about six. You should have a nap till four, when the boy will bring you a cup of tea. After that you might have a shot at the pigeons. You'll find a gun and cartridges in my room."

"Thanks awfully, that will be ripping. Where is the best place to go?"

"Cross the field in front there on to the Selesseh road, and then turn to your left. You will come to an old planting road leading towards the river, and should get several shots. It may interest you to know that the old road is called Tiger Lane, but you needn't expect to meet such big game, as it is years since the last tiger was killed near the place. Remember that the sun sets at six, and darkness falls at once.—Syce!" he called; and as an answering shout came from the stables, Stanley made his way up

to his room. He stepped forward to shut the doors on to the veranda, and his eye fell on a white figure moving amongst the trees. The boy was evidently taking a stroll, and presently, with a quick, furtive look at the house, he disappeared behind a thicket of bamboo. For a moment the lad's suspicions were aroused, but remembering his uncle's words, he dismissed the matter from his mind, and settling into a long chair soon fell asleep.

Promptly at four o'clock the Chinese boy wakened Stanley and brought up a cup of tea. As he set out the little table the lad glanced curiously at his yellow, impassive face, wondering what thoughts were passing in the active brain behind. Soon, however, the thought of Tiger's Lane banished everything else from his mind, and it was not long before he was hurrying across the field with his uncle's gun under his arm and a dozen cartridges in his pocket. The fierce heat of the earlier hours was gone, and the sun shone with the tempered warmth of an English summer day. A stalwart *oppas* was seated outside his house trimming his long beard, and chanting a mournful Indian ditty. Jumping the three-foot *parrit*, or ditch, Stanley reached the Selesseh road, and following it for a short distance, came upon an old disused track branching off as his uncle had stated; and he knew this must be Tiger Lane. Coarse.

grass had grown over it to a considerable height, concealing the ditches on either side, but in the centre the growth had been somewhat kept down by the passage of cattle and wild animals. The lad's excitement rose as he found himself for the first time about to set foot on unknown ground which might shelter anything from a deer to an elephant. A curious quietness hung over the place, and the absence of bird life was remarkable. The weird strain chanted by the Sikh came floating on the still air, and glancing back along the road, Stanley noticed a coolie apparently coming towards him. Cocking both barrels and holding his gun ready for any game, he stepped on to the path and moved forward cautiously. A fear of snakes made his progress slow, but as he advanced he gained confidence and stepped out. Up till now he had not seen a single bird except the swallows and sparrows round about the house, but as the path took a bend he perceived that some distance ahead the outskirts of the jungle on the right came close down to the old road, and at this point birds could be seen on the wing. Suddenly something flashed across the path before he could raise the gun to his shoulder, and he realized that he had missed a grand chance of a snap shot. Now keenly on the alert, he moved on, and a moment later a small bird rose with a whirr just ahead. Bang! and a cloud of

feathers answered the shot. The bird dropped like a stone, but in the long grass it took some time to recover its body, and as the young sportsman approached the fringe of jungle, he found to his dismay, on looking at his watch, that it was already 5.30. It would take him all his time to return before darkness fell, and—ha! got him that time. A pigeon had flashed out of the trees only to meet a sudden death. Several followed quickly and escaped scathless, and Stanley promised himself that he would take just one more shot before leaving. He faced about to get the birds against the light, and stood waiting. A stick cracking in the jungle behind made him glance over his shoulder, but nothing was to be seen, and the silence remained unbroken. He turned his head and caught sight of a bird flying straight towards him. His eye measured the distance, and at the proper moment the gun flew to his shoulder, but as his finger closed on the trigger a loud report came from behind him, and something went screaming past his head. The pigeon sped on uninjured, and the lad wheeled round in startled surprise.

“Hullo there!” he called loudly, “mind where you’re shooting.” A little cloud of blue smoke eddied out from the undergrowth, but there was no reply to his hail. “Hullo!” he called again, and getting no answer, turned and hurried back along the old road.

An uncomfortable feeling possessed him that he himself had been the intended victim of the unseen marksman, but such a thing seemed hardly credible. Why should such a dastardly outrage have been attempted on one who had only just arrived in the country? After all, the whole affair might have been accidental. Perhaps some native had been out after the pigeons also, and letting off his fowling-piece carelessly, had been afraid to answer when challenged. The lad had gathered from his closing remarks at tiffin that Mr. Manson was inclined to consider his apprehensions of further attempts on the jewelled lizard as groundless, and he was unwilling to exaggerate the significance of what might appear a very trifling incident. He had no great desire to be laughed at or have his freedom restricted, and in consequence resolved to keep silence with regard to the occurrence. Darkness was rapidly falling as he gained the lawn, and the light from the lamps shone with a homely welcome as he approached the house.

"Well, what luck?" asked his uncle, strolling towards him, cigar in mouth. "From the sound of the shots you seemed to have had fair sport."

"There was some one else out shooting also," replied Stanley, with apparent carelessness.

"Ah, was there? None of my assistants surely. They would not come down here to shoot."

"The shot seemed to come from the jungle."

"A Malay probably; but they generally go out and wait for deer at night."

"Do any of the coolies shoot?"

Mr. Manson laughed. "Hardly! The Dutch don't allow them firearms; and if they did, hardly one of the Chinamen would know how to use them. Where's the bag?"

By this time they had reached the house, and the lad pulled the birds out of his pocket.

"A pigeon and a quail—that is capital. You must have a keen appetite for dinner. Did you find the sport in Tiger Lane as exciting as you expected, eh?"

"Almost," said Stanley, with rather a forced laugh, wondering as he laid aside the gun whether such sport was not just a little too exciting.

CHAPTER V.

THE STORY OF THE SULTAN'S JEWELS.

THE week following his arrival was a busy and interesting one for Stanley Linward. On the day after the adventure in Tiger Lane, Dr. Lipsham called at Bekoeda on his usual round of the estate, and Mr. Manson asked him to overhaul his nephew. After a careful examination the lad was pronounced perfectly fit and well, the long sea voyage having effectually cured the threatened lung trouble.

"I'll tell you what it is," said the breezy Irish doctor, when reporting to the manager, "the lad is as healthy a young fellow as I've had the pleasure of dealing with for many a long day—as sound as a bell and as strong as a horse. When he fills out later on he will be a splendid specimen of a man. You need have no fear about his health."

"Then you think there is no weakness left?"

"Not the slightest. The boy was simply outgrowing his strength, and owing to the sedentary life at school the mischief settled on his lungs. You may

take my word for it that there is absolutely no trace of disease left. Give him plenty of food and open air, and he is fit to go anywhere and do anything. Now I must be getting on—heard any more from the controller about the lease?”

“No,” replied Mr. Manson gravely, “there has been no further communication. It does not look well, as he promised to let me know if matters were arranged satisfactorily. I’m just afraid that the sultan is holding out, and in that case there may be trouble. I can’t make it out at all.”

“It is that treacherous scoundrel Hiram K. Isaacs, as he calls himself, who is at the bottom of it all,” said the doctor vehemently. “The fellow is so suave and plausible that he would have got round a far cleverer man than the sultan. In any case,” the speaker continued, rising as his trap came to the door, “you may be sure that all your friends, Dutch and English, will stick to you through thick and thin, and do their best to see you righted.”

“Thank you, I am sure of it,” answered Mr. Manson, grasping the hand that was held out to him. “Van Holst wrote me a very sympathetic letter the other day offering to use his influence with the Dutch Government through his brother the Colonial Secretary. He met my nephew on his way up from Belawen, and seemed much taken

with him. Look in any time you are passing. Good-bye."

Thus it came about that with the doctor's sanction Stanley was initiated into the ordinary routine of a planter's life. Rising before the sun was up in the cool morning air, he accompanied his uncle to the fermenting shed, where Alec Stevens, the extra assistant, issued the orders for the day. In the dim light of the breaking dawn the natives assembled: the Chinamen slopping along imperturbably in their high wooden shoes, smoking evil-smelling cigarettes; the Klings chattering and shouting; the Javanese women chanting quaint, plaintive airs. Mr. Manson stood quietly by, leaving everything to Stevens, who had received his instructions overnight.

Stanley watched the young fellow with envy as he stepped forward and issued his directions to the foremen—*tandils* or *mandors*—in Malay. First of all the *mandor* of the Kling bullock drivers was called up, and, notebook in hand, received his orders: so many carts to go to Selesseh and meet the train, so many to Road III. to carry materials for drying sheds, so many to Road VI. to fetch attap leaves, and so on. The *mandor* repeated his instructions, and saluting, hurried away to get his men started. The Boyans came next: silent, active men these, revengeful by nature and quick to use the knife. Being employed

only for building, their instructions took but a short time. Then the *tandil* of the fermenting shed called out the roll, and each coolie as he answered to his name passed in. The Javanese women followed, and as the sun rose with startling suddenness the *oppas* on duty struck six sharp blows on the rich-toned metal gong, and another day's work had commenced. Simultaneously the sound of horns came wafting from far and near, indicating that the coolies out on the planting fields had also started their labours. Mr. Manson generally strolled through the shed before returning to the house. Silently and quickly the coolies took up their allotted stations: sorting out the leaves, tying them in bundles, measuring and pressing them, while the brown-faced, betel-chewing little women carried the bundles from place to place, pulling down a small staple there and erecting a larger one here. Stevens showed the newcomer how the temperature of each staple was taken by means of a thermometer thrust into a hollow bamboo, which was cleverly built up along with the tobacco. Thrice daily each staple had its temperature recorded, and by these results Mr. Manson regulated the process of fermentation. For the first few days the dry, pungent smell pervading the whole shed made young Linward sneeze repeatedly, but his appetite never failed for the breakfast which was always ready on

their return to the house. After that meal a visit was generally paid to the stables to see that the syces attended to the horses, and then the serious business of the day commenced.

Quick and anxious to learn, Stanley soon picked up the routine of the books, and felt proud of being able to render some real assistance to his uncle, while Alec Stevens was only too glad to hand over some of his lighter duties. At first there was a good deal of office work, as the assistants had just gone out to the fields to prepare the ground for another year's crop of tobacco, and all the new books had to be opened with each coolie's individual account. But one day after the shed had been opened as usual, Mr. Manson announced that the arrears had been cleared off, and he intended to drive up to Road VI., the most outlying division, and inspect the work of Gardner's *kongsie*, or gang of coolies.

The dogcart was ordered round at eight sharp, and Stanley was almost unable to eat his breakfast with excitement at the idea of the coming drive. Just as they were finishing their meal, a native in uniform came to the door, and saluting in military style, handed Mr. Manson a large blue envelope. The manager tore it open, and after a glance at the contents informed the messenger that there was no answer. Leaving the table, Mr. Manson did not

appear again till the dogcart drove under the porch. Stanley noticed that he looked worried and pre-occupied, and it was with an obvious effort that he roused himself to point out features of interest to his nephew as they jogged along the road.

"That is the hospital for our coolies," he said, pointing with his whip to a group of buildings standing back a short distance from the road. "The Chinese *krani*, or clerk, in charge is a wonderful fellow: writes English and Dutch, and can draw up a prescription nearly as well as Dr. Lipsham himself, yet he smokes enough opium to kill half a dozen ordinary men. How would you like to take charge of the hospital for a bit?"

"Take charge of the hospital!" echoed Stanley, in amazement. "I don't know anything about medicine."

His uncle laughed. "I expect not," he said; "but the extra assistant is given charge of the drugs, etc., and you know quite as much as any of the others did. Alec Stevens hates the work, and rather shirks it. What do you say?"

"I—I really don't know if I could do it."

"Oh, as to that there will be no difficulty; you will take over the keys of the medicine-chest and give out what the *krani* sends for. Twice a week you will have to prepare a list of invalids for the

doctor's inspection, and see that they are ready waiting for his arrival. At odd times you might ride up to the hospital and see that everything is neat and clean. I shall give you a horse for your own use, and pay you fifty dollars, or five pounds, a month."

Stanley gasped. Could he believe his own ears? His foot seemed to be on the ladder of his ambitions, and the glorious prospect was almost too dazzling.

"O Uncle Ralph, how awfully good of you! It will be ripping! And if I manage all right, will you let me be one of your regular assistants? I do so want to be a real planter."

Mr. Manson's face clouded at this eager appeal, and for a few moments he remained silent. Stanley glanced at him in apprehension, lest his request had been precipitate; but his uncle was gazing far ahead, lost in thought.

"My lad," he said presently, "under ordinary circumstances nothing would have given me greater pleasure than to have kept you as my assistant. Though you have only been here a short time, I have seen enough to feel sure that you would be a real worker and a successful planter. But in the first place you would have to get your mother's sanction, for without that the thing is impossible." The speaker held up his hand, to stop the lad's eager promises of the required permission. "In the second

place," he went on, more gravely, "it is quite possible that I myself may have to leave the estate. I had not intended to speak to you about these matters, yet—a crisis seems to be approaching. Briefly put, the facts are these: Twenty years ago, when quite a young man, and acting as assistant on the same estate as Van Holst, I fell heir to a small sum of money. At that time tobacco was not the paying business it is now, and the country round about here was in a very bad way owing to the mismanagement of affairs by officials sent out from home and frequent raids from the Achinese. While talking over the investment of my legacy with Van Holst, he happened to show me a letter he had just received from his brother, who held some minor post in the Colonial Office in Holland. I was so struck by the confident manner in which he wrote of the future of the tobacco industry in this part of the country that, after consultation with some of the older planters, I bought this estate.

"At that time there was not a house on the place, not a road in existence; now—you see what it is like," continued the speaker, with a wave of his whip to indicate the neighbouring lands. "Every inch of this road I made myself, every building that you can see was put up by me; and yet, and yet—I may be forced to leave.

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"About three months ago the controller paid me a friendly visit, and, to my surprise and consternation, informed me that the Sultan of Lankat had suddenly intimated a claim for the return of the estate to him at the sum I originally bought it for. After the first surprise I was inclined to laugh at the idea, for the sultan had always been most friendly and pleasant; but the controller speedily showed me how serious the matter really was. Under an old treaty between his ancestors and the Dutch, entered into at the time of the occupation of the country and still existing, it seems that the sultan has the power, within twenty-one years, of claiming again land purchased from him—if it is proved that it was originally sold under a misconception of its value. This, of course, would not include the cultivation of tobacco, because I frankly stated my intention of growing it; but the claim is put forward under the plea that oil has been discovered on the estate. I immediately gave private instructions to a Singapore firm of engineers to find out the truth of this contention. The letter I received this morning contains their report, and confirms the presence of oil in small quantities. That is, roughly, the position of affairs at present, although there are further complications. The assistants are aware of the claim hanging over my head, but have stood by me loyally to a man, as have all my friends, Dutch and English."

"What a beastly shame!" burst out Stanley hotly. "Surely the controller will back you up."

"Unfortunately, he is in a position of great difficulty. The Achinese are at present giving great trouble to the authorities, who have to be very careful and conciliate native prejudices. The Sultan of Lankat has great influence with them, and his secession would mean a serious loss to the Dutch. Van Holst, however, has written to his brother, who is now Colonial Secretary, and we must just hope for the best. Here we are at Road VI.; hold on tight, in case you get pitched out—planting-roads are not pleasant to drive over after the wet season."

As Mr. Manson finished speaking, they struck off the main road and turned sharply to the right. On the left a belt of virgin jungle formed the boundary between Bekoeda and the next estate; and in the angle formed by the two roads Stanley noticed one of the huge *twalang* trees towering high above its neighbours. Presently they came in sight of a house similar to that occupied by the manager, but not so large. Crossing a small wooden bridge over the ditch, they pulled up at the foot of the front stairs leading into the veranda.

"Come along," said Mr. Manson, jumping down; "we are sure to find Gardner on his division at this time of the day."

Following the road for some little distance, uncle and nephew came upon a patch of ground which was being cleared for planting. For a mile or so the jungle had been cut down, all but the fruit trees, and a hundred coolies were now at work clearing away the undergrowth.

As they approached the scene of labour a tall European in mud-bespattered clothes, and sox pulled over the ends of his trousers, came forward at once and exchanged greetings with the manager.

"Good-morning, sir," he said pleasantly. "We are getting along slowly, but the growth is very heavy up here."

"Good-morning, Gardner. I knew you would have hard work on this division, but your tobacco crop will be all the better. This is my nephew, Stanley Linward, who is very keen to see a planter at his work."

Gardner, an active-looking young fellow, shook hands heartily. "I am afraid you will be somewhat disappointed at the look of things here just now," he remarked. "Until the ground is burnt off it resembles nothing so much as the wreckage left after the passage of a hurricane."

"Oh, that doesn't matter to me," said Stanley, laughing. "I want to see the work from the very beginning."

After an hour spent in going over the division from end to end, young Linward began to have some idea of the enormous labour and trouble required in preparing the ground for the crop; and on the return of the little party to the house he felt done up and parched with the intense heat, and gladly availed himself of Gardner's offer of a cooling drink. They sat chatting for a few minutes, while the syce was bringing round the dogcart, and during the brief conversation the young fellows took a mutual liking to one another, and had a good laugh at the expense of "Champion" Richards of the *Avagee*.

"Well, we must be going," said Mr. Manson at length, rising. "I am giving a small dinner-party to-morrow night to celebrate my nephew's arrival, and I hope you will join us, Gardner. It is just amongst ourselves, to introduce this young man to his fellow assistants."

Gardner accepted the invitation at once, remarking that it was fully a fortnight since he had been off his division, and shortly afterwards the dogcart drove off.

Stanley was full of all that he had seen during his first visit to the fields, and during tiffin kept his uncle busy answering his numerous questions. In the evening the medicine-chest was formally handed over into his charge, and he was duly installed as extra assistant according to Mr. Manson's promise. He

slept that night sounder than he had ever done before, and on wakening was ashamed to find that his uncle had already returned from the fermenting shed. Somewhat downcast he offered apologies for his slackness, but Mr. Manson laughingly assured him that the boy had received orders not to disturb his slumbers.

"I don't want to have you ill on my hands, or your mother will take me to task. It is better to go easy for a bit until one is acclimatized."

Stanley confessed that he was still feeling the effects of his first day's experience of field work; but a quiet day in the office removed all traces of his fatigue, and he was quite equal to a game of tennis with his uncle in the evening. After a bath and change he joined Mr. Manson in the front veranda, and was introduced to Macandrew, the head assistant, who happened to be the first arrival amongst the guests. Very soon the little party was complete, all the Europeans on Bekoeda being present, with the exception of Middleton, whose turn it was to keep watch on the estate. Dinner being announced they all took their places, and from the first Stanley found himself quite at home amongst his new companions. The talk was terribly "shoppy," tobacco being the theme of paramount importance, and time and again young Linward had to appeal to Gardner, who sat next him, for an explanation of technical terms.

During a lull in the conversation Macandrew asked his manager if there had been any communication from the Singapore experts with regard to their investigations into the alleged existence of oil on the estate. Mr. Manson informed them of the result of the tests, and there was a general expression of sympathy and annoyance.

"I suppose it would be useless calling in another expert?" queried Macandrew.

"I am afraid so," replied Mr. Manson; "Guntzel and Turnbull is a firm of the highest standing."

"It seems a shame that the discovery of this wretched oil should give the sultan an excuse for this claim," growled Menzies, a burly Scotsman. "If I got hold of Hiram K. Isaacs I would twist his neck for him."

This statement was greeted with a general laugh, for Menzies's antipathy to the individual in question was a constant source of merriment to the others.

"Who is this Isaacs?" asked Stanley curiously, turning to Gardner.

"A very 'cute but unscrupulous Yankee, who is supposed to be at the bottom of this affair. Some years ago he appeared in Medan, but no one seems to know anything of his former life. He applied to your uncle for a post, but there was no vacancy on the estate at the time. The man, however, appeared

to be so hard up and friendless that Mr. Manson, out of pure kindness, asked him up to Bekoeda, and he stayed here for quite a long time. He was treated as one of ourselves, and his doings were never questioned; but it is pretty generally understood now that he employed himself prospecting for oil on the estate, and the result of his underhand dealings is to be seen in this claim. On leaving Bekoeda he attached himself by some means to the Sultan of Lankat, with whom he seems to be on terms of extreme intimacy. Up till that time the sultan had always been very friendly towards us, and frequently interchanged visits with Mr. Manson, but of late he has never been near the place."

In the meantime, at the other end of the table, a hot discussion was going on regarding the sultan's changed attitude, most of the assistants criticising him severely, while Mr. Manson and Macandrew were inclined to excuse him on the ground of expediency.

"You must remember," said the former to Menzies, who was loud in his denunciations, "that the sultan is quite justified from his point of view in taking full advantage of this old treaty to regain some of his lost wealth. It must be a hard task for him to keep up the style and dignity attaching to his rank, especially in view of the rivalry between himself and the Sultan of Deli. The latter obtains an enormous income from

the duty levied from the oil fields worked on his lands, and the Sultan of Lankat is further handicapped by the loss of his family jewels, as these represented practically his whole capital."

"That may be so," admitted Menzies grudgingly; "but all the same I don't see why the beggar should recoup himself at your expense. Surely he could recover most of his jewels if he insisted on the Dutch authorities taking up the matter in earnest,"

"It does seem strange," assented the manager, "that such a priceless collection should have disappeared so completely.—You must know," he continued, turning to Stanley, "that these native princes invariably turn their wealth into jewels; and in this way collections handed down through generations often represent colossal fortunes. Some years ago the Sultan of Lankat, who had come into the possession of unique family heirlooms in this way, lost practically everything in a single night. Having attended a State ball at Medan, at which, owing to the splendour and magnificence of his jewels, he was the outstanding figure, he was returning home when, in the early hours of the morning, the robbery was effected. On a lonely part of the route the carriage containing the jewel casket was suddenly surrounded by a band of masked men, who burst out of the jungle on both sides of the road. So quickly was

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the whole affair carried through that before the main bodyguard could get back to the scene, the thieves had disappeared with their booty, leaving the few natives who formed the escort dead or dying round the carriage."

"Was nothing ever recovered?" asked Stanley, who had listened with intense interest. "Why did the sultan's men not follow up the robbers at once?"

"They did their best, but night had fallen, and the attempt to track the thieves in the dense jungle was fruitless. The sultan, of course, offered a large reward, and the Dutch authorities seconded his efforts, but up to the present time not a single clue has been obtained. It is all the more extraordinary when the value of the jewels is taken into account, one small crown alone, consisting of magnificent emeralds and rubies, being valued at upwards of half a million sterling."

"By Jove! what a treasure to find," exclaimed Stanley, with sparkling eyes. "It makes my jewelled lizard sound very cheap and worthless."

"Your jewelled lizard!" echoed Macandrew, in surprise. "What do you mean?"

Stanley hesitated and glanced at his uncle, rather abashed at finding himself the centre of interest.

"My nephew had quite an adventure coming over in the *Avagee*," interposed Mr. Manson, "and accidentally came into possession of a curio in the shape

of a jewelled lizard, as he mentioned just now. The whole affair is somewhat mysterious, and has not yet been cleared up. I rather fancy that Stanley is inclined to think that he has become the owner of some trinket which may even possess magical properties equal to those of Aladdin's ring."

The boy joined good-humouredly in the laugh which followed the conclusion of his uncle's remark.

"This sounds rather exciting," cried Alec Stevens. "Do tell us how you got hold of this talisman, or whatever it is."

The other members of the company joining in the request, Stanley proceeded to relate in detail the history of his curious find, and ended by describing the attempt which he felt certain had been made by the Chinaman to force an entrance into his cabin in order to regain possession of the lizard.

"Hum—strange!" muttered Gardner, blowing a ring of tobacco smoke towards the ceiling. "The thing must be worth something, I should say, if—"

"Oh, not necessarily," interrupted Menzies. "In my opinion it's probably nothing more than an ordinary coolie joss with a piece of glass stuck in for an eye."

"For my own part I'm perfectly satisfied that the stone is a real diamond," said Mr. Manson.—"You might let these fellows have a look at it, Stanley; then they can judge for themselves."

The boy agreed readily enough, and taking the keys which his uncle handed to him, rose from the table. Passing behind the screen, he crossed the smoking vestibule and entered the office. Here all was in darkness; but as he groped his way towards the spot where he knew the safe was situated his eye caught the gleam of moonlight, and he became aware of the fact that the outer door was standing open. He paused, wondering if the *oppas* had forgotten to shoot the bolts; and as he did so, the door through which he had just entered swung gently to behind him. The boy started: he knew the hinge had no spring, and not a breath of wind stirred the hot, calm air. Outside, the myriad chorus of insects served but to emphasize the profound silence, while from the dining-room came the hum of friendly voices and cheery laughter. Reassured by the sound, and half ashamed of his fears, Linward turned again towards the safe, when a slight movement arrested his steps and sent a chill of fear tingling through his veins.

In the darkness, not a yard from where he stood, a chair had grated on the tiled floor; and as though warned by some strange sense of impending danger, Stanley realized that he was not alone. Hardly aware of his actions, he raised his right arm in self-defence; but before he had time to utter a cry for help,

a hand seized his throat in a vice-like grip and held him powerless. Instinctively the lad's left arm shot out to ward off the blow which he felt his unseen antagonist was about to deliver, and by some lucky chance his grasp closed on the latter's wrist. For a few seconds, which seemed ages, they stood thus—the one striving to release his arm, the other to retain his hold. The lad struck out wildly with his right fist, but without effect. He strove to shout for help, but the terrible grip on his throat never relaxed, and his fate appeared to be sealed. His eyes felt as if they were starting out of his head, the blood drummed in his brain, and his breath came in gasping sobs. With a last desperate effort he let go his grip of his opponent's wrist, and using his left hand, tore the strangling fingers from his throat; but even as he did so a sharp pain like the touch of a red-hot iron shot through his left shoulder, and with a choking cry for help he fell back unconscious.

CHAPTER VI.

PENANG v. SUMATRA.

WHEN he opened his eyes Stanley found himself lying on a long chair out in the porch. A tall white-robed *oppas* stood by holding a lantern; while Gardner, kneeling at his side, was engaged in bathing his shoulder. For a few seconds he gazed about him, feeling rather dazed; then like a flash came back to him the recollection of his recent encounter.

“Did you catch him?” he asked faintly.

Gardner looked up quickly. “So you have come to,” he said, with satisfaction. “No, we did not catch the wretch, though we were in time to prevent him finishing you off altogether. He has given you a nasty slash in the shoulder here, but you may thank your stars you have got off so cheaply.”

Stanley was about to ask for his uncle, when Mr. Manson’s voice was heard in the office. “That you, doctor?” he called, evidently at the telephone. “Can you come up here at once? my nephew has been

slightly wounded. No, not badly; apparently a dagger. Quite a clean cut. Thanks very much." Hanging up the receiver, he came out into the porch. "Well, my boy," he said, stooping over the long chair, "how are you feeling now? I hope your arm is not very painful."

Gardner had already begun to bandage up the wound, and under his unskilful though kindly touch the lad could not help wincing.

"Oh, it's not very painful, Uncle Ralph," he replied bravely; "but my throat is very sore."

"I wish we could have caught the beggar," said Mr. Manson grimly, "but I am afraid he got clear off. Menzies and the rest of them are after him, but on a dark night like this there is little use in following. I suppose," continued the manager, with a searching glance at his nephew, "that you have no idea who your assailant was?"

"No; it was too dark," replied the latter, returning his gaze. "When I went into the office I noticed that the outer door was slightly ajar, but paid little heed to the fact. Just as I was on the point of opening the safe some one caught me by the throat, and after a struggle I managed to free myself and call out, but as I did so something hot seemed to strike me on the shoulder, and I remember no more."

"We were just beginning to wonder at your long

absence, when the sound of your cry and fall startled us. We jumped up, and Gardner here was into the office like a shot."

"Too late, unfortunately, to catch the villain, whoever he was," interposed the assistant. "Some one dashed out of the other door as I entered, but I turned my attention at once to Linward. Perhaps these fellows can give us some clue," he added, as steps were heard coming up the avenue.

The pursuers were talking in excited tones amongst themselves, and Menzies's deep voice could be heard uttering dire threats against the unknown assailant.

"Escaped, I suppose?" called out Mr. Manson, as the little group emerged into the light.

"Yes, curse him! If ever I——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the manager impatiently, "we all know what would happen if once you got him in your clutches; but did any of you manage to pick up a clue?"

Macandrew shook his head. "No such luck," he said quietly. "I did catch a glimpse of a dark figure disappearing into the jungle at the back of the *oppas* house, but further search in that direction at night time is useless. I was lucky enough, however, to come across your bunch of keys, which the fellow had evidently dropped in his flight."

Stanley had listened eagerly to this conversation,

but the pain in his shoulder and the shock of the encounter were beginning to tell on him, and he felt sick and dizzy. Noticing his condition, his uncle, with the help of Gardner and the others, carried him in the long chair up to his room and lifted him into bed; after which, at Macandrew's suggestion, the assistants withdrew, as they could be of no further use.

Shortly after they had gone the rattle of wheels announced Dr. Lipsham's arrival, and hurrying upstairs, he proceeded at once to examine the patient's shoulder, and speedily announced the wound to be trifling.

"A day or two in bed will put you all right again," he said cheerily, as he finished fastening up the bandages. "Your arm will be stiff for some time, but that will only keep you out of mischief. A nice clean cut in the fleshy part of the shoulder; one inch lower and—tut! tut! that is always what they put in the newspapers. There!" he added, as his deft fingers completed their task, "I shall give you something to keep off fever, and then you must lie quiet and get what sleep you can."

Having assured Mr. Manson that his nephew was in no danger, and promising to drive up early next morning, Dr. Lipsham jumped into his dogcart and returned to Bindjei.

Stanley passed a restless night, but towards morning dozed off into a refreshing sleep, which lasted until the doctor looked in about eleven.

"You will do famously now," said the latter, after the lad's temperature had been taken. "The fever has been kept off, and your own splendid constitution will do the rest."

Doctor Lipsham's words proved correct, for in a day or two Stanley was up and about again, feeling not much the worse of his recent encounter, and secretly rather proud of his bandaged arm. Every endeavour had been made to trace the lad's assailant, but without success. Mr. Manson had made searching inquiries into the meaning of the open door, which he was certain had been bolted when he left the office. The *oppas* on duty was equally positive that the door had been tightly secured when he tried it, according to his usual custom, about eight o'clock. As Linward had not entered the room till after eight, it appeared that the unknown marauder had been on the watch, and had slipped in the moment the *oppas* had turned his back. How the door had become unfastened in that time remained a mystery; but the fact that the fugitive had dropped the bunch of keys in his flight seemed to show that the contents of the safe had been his real objective. In his own mind Stanley was convinced that his jewelled lizard was again

responsible for the attempt, and he hinted as much to his uncle, who, however, was not inclined to adopt this view.

“I cannot think that such can be the case,” he replied, when his nephew broached the subject. “No one but ourselves knew that the lizard had been placed in the safe, and certainly no one could have guessed that you would be alone in the office at that hour. No; it seems much more likely that some stray robber, seeing the door open, slipped in on the chance of picking up some loose cash. The fact is well known, of course, that every fortnight we get several thousand dollars in silver from the bank to pay the coolies, and an attempted robbery at such a time is no uncommon occurrence.”

As the days passed and no further light was shed on the incident, Stanley began to persuade himself that his uncle's theory must be the true explanation of his unpleasant experience. For some time little else was spoken about on the estate; but in that wild land startling incidents were of frequent occurrence, and the men soon had other matters to occupy their attention.

The attention of Mr. Manson also and his nephew was diverted not long afterwards. At breakfast one morning, on opening a large envelope which had been brought by a native messenger, the manager gave vent to a surprised exclamation.

"By Jove! this is unexpected," he said, looking across at his nephew. "The Sultan of Lankat writes me that he proposes coming over to spend a day and a night here during Chinese New Year."

"How ripping!" cried Stanley, his eyes sparkling with excitement; then suddenly recollecting his uncle's position, he added, "But isn't his visit rather inopportune under the circumstances?"

"It strikes me that way also," the manager replied thoughtfully. "He hints here that we might come to terms over this oil business, and I expect that is the real object of his visit; but I must say that I wish the Yankee Isaacs was not going to accompany him."

"Is he coming too?" queried the lad.

"Evidently, from this note. By-the-bye," Mr. Manson went on, handing the letter across the table, "it may interest you to see the sultan's own writing."

Stanley, who by this time had obtained a fair smattering of Malay, glanced over the document, which was penned in a fine, scholarly manner.

"I can hardly make out a word of it, though the writing is very good," he said presently, looking up at Mr. Manson with a perplexed air.

"No wonder," said the latter, smiling. "The sultan writes correct, high-class Malay, while we use a vulgar, colloquial variety in our work with the

natives. One might as well compare the English language as taught in the schoolrooms at Eton with the dialect of a Lancashire miner."

"I didn't think of that," was the lad's reply, returning the letter. "But now, if the sultan comes for Chinese New Year, will his visit not stop our cricket match?"

"I think not," answered Mr. Manson. "He is very fond of watching our English games, and often used to come across for a tennis match. In any case, we could not put off the Penang team at this late date. In my reply to the sultan, however, I shall mention that this match is to take place, so that he may choose his own hour for arriving. Has Macandrew told you yet at what hour he intends to start the game?"

"Eight o'clock, I believe."

As Chinese New Year approached, the thoughts of all the assistants on the estate had become focussed on the annual cricket match with a team from Penang. This was the one general holiday all over the country, when work was relaxed for two or three days; and the rivalry between the two teams had increased with each successive match. The game was played alternately in Penang and Sumatra, and the previous year the planters had suffered a crushing defeat on their opponents' ground. Strenuous

efforts were accordingly being made to reverse this decision on the present occasion, and excitement ran very high. A pitch in the field in front of the *oppas* house had been in special preparation for some weeks, and practice was indulged in at every possible opportunity. The Sumatran team was to consist of the seven assistants from Bekoeda, Dr. Lipsham, and two sporting Dutchmen from neighbouring estates. Stanley, on his arrival, had been promptly included in the eleven, but owing to the injury to his shoulder his inclusion in the team was now doubtful. As the fateful day drew near the lad's anxiety increased, but Dr. Lipsham refused to give his permission until nearer the time. As it happened, the doctor was called to a distant estate two days previous to the match, and it was uncertain whether he would get back in time to participate in the game or allow Linward to do so.

The Penang team arrived the evening before the event, and a great dinner was held in their honour at the club-house, situated some little distance from the manager's house. Mr. Manson and his nephew were invited, but left early, and Stanley lay awake for a long time listening to the strains of the choruses that came floating in on the still, warm air, and speculating on his chances of a share in the game on the morrow. He was awakened by the sound of explod-

ing fireworks, which, his uncle assured him later, was the usual Chinese custom for celebrating the day. From early morning till nightfall streams of coolies in their best attire thronged the roads, passing to and from the little village of Bindjei.

As the lad and his uncle sat down to breakfast, the rival teams commenced to assemble on the playing-field, where a rough shed had been erected to do duty for a pavilion.

"O Uncle Ralph," pleaded Stanley, "won't you give me permission yourself to play to-day? See, my arm is all right again;" and he whirled it round vigorously as he spoke.

"My dear lad," said his uncle kindly, "I would be only too glad to see you playing, and am almost as much disappointed as yourself about the matter, but without Dr. Lipsham's sanction I do not feel at liberty to run the risk. What could I say to your mother if anything happened to you?"

The lad made no reply, but he felt the force of his uncle's words, and was settling down to his breakfast with as much appetite as he could muster under the circumstances, when a sound of loud cheering caused them both to look up. The crunching of wheels on the gravel announced the approach of some vehicle, and a minute later Dr. Lipsham drove up to the door.

"Hurrah!" shouted Stanley, upsetting his cup in his excitement; "now I shall be allowed to play."

"Gently, gently," laughed the genial doctor, dismounting as he spoke; "I shall make no rash promises until I have had something to eat."

"Come away then," said Mr. Manson, leading the way back to the table; "I am sure you must be hungry after your long drive."

Dr. Lipsham did not hurry over the meal, but at last he pushed his chair back.

"Now let me have a look at that shoulder, young man," he said. "I can see you are fidgeting with impatience, and no doubt calling me hard names under your breath."

After a careful examination the boy was pronounced sound and fit to play, and his delight and excitement knew no bounds when he realized that, after all, he was to take part in the great match. The little party strolled over to the field; and the news that the Sumatran Eleven would, after all, be complete created the liveliest satisfaction, and Stanley was warmly congratulated.

The preliminaries were soon over, and Macandrew winning the toss, the Penang men took the field without delay. The onlookers settled themselves comfortably, while Gardner and his captain faced the bowling.

The former took first knock at the road end, and after getting "centre," had a good look round to see how the fielders were placed, and then, grasping his bat, faced the bowler. The attack was opened by Brown, the Penang fast bowler, whose style was most disconcerting. Taking a very long run, he held the ball behind him in his left hand till the last moment, when he passed it by a quick movement to his right and delivered it with a high, swinging action. His pace was terrific, and on the fiery ground the ball bumped badly; but Gardner faced him coolly, letting the high ones past untouched and blocking the straight ones steadily till "over" was called. Anthony took up the bowling at the other end, and his methods were in complete contrast to Brown's. Sauntering up to the wicket, he delivered the ball gently and easily, as though glad to be rid of it; but at times he swerved a lot, and no one could make the ball turn more on a hard ground. Macandrew met the first two deliveries cautiously, but a shout of dismay went up when he played all over the next and was dismissed for a cither.

Menzies strode in—and out; for in attempting a mighty slog off Anthony he made a complete mis-hit, and was easily caught at slip. Five runs scored and two wickets down. Things looked bad for the planters.

Gardner was playing a steady game, shaping well at Brown, but both he and Kottman fell victims to the wily Anthony. Dr. Lipsham scored a dozen, mostly by lucky snicks through the slips; but the score had only reached the half century when Stanley went in as last man. He did his best to stem the tide of disaster, but the lack of practice on the hard ground told against him, and a shooter from Brown soon knocked his off stump out of the ground. Penang were jubilant, but the planters were silent and glum. All out for 59! Such a low score had never before been recorded in this match, and their work was cut out for them if the game was to be saved.

After a short interval Sumatra went out to field, Doctor Lipsham, cheery as ever, acting as wicket-keeper, and the game was immediately restarted. Kottman and Middleton were the first bowlers, but the batsmen were in no hurry, and runs accrued slowly. Twenty-seven had been scored when the first wicket fell, smartly stumped, and Haviland, the crack batsman of Penang, came in. Try as they would, the home team were unable to dislodge him. Wickets fell at intervals, but the score mounted steadily, and stood at 133 when the innings closed, leaving Haviland not out with a grand 47.

An adjournment was made to the club-house, where lunch was partaken, it having been arranged that

play in the afternoon should not start until three o'clock. While the others were lounging about or playing billiards in the club, Macandrew and Gardner slipped out for an inspection of the pitch and a consultation as to the best plan of campaign. Stanley soon joined them, and as he came up his captain turned to him.

"Look here, Linward," he said, "I mean to change the order of going in, and want a safe, steady bat to help Gardner here to break the bowling. We were both much taken with your style this morning, and fancy you are the man we want. What do you say?"

"It's awfully good of you," replied the lad, delighted at the unexpected compliment, "but the pace of the pitch rather upsets me, and I need some practice before—"

"Oh, that is all right," interrupted Gardner quickly. "We shall give you twenty minutes' practice now, and after that you will have half an hour's rest before the game starts."

The lad accepted the offer gratefully, and at the end of the stipulated time he felt decidedly more confident in his ability to time the ball. Punctually at three o'clock the game was resumed; and as the Penang players turned out to field, a well-equipped carriage with two spirited gray horses drove up to

the manager's house. Stanley was busy strapping on his pads, but he looked up on hearing an exclamation from Menzies.

"Well, if that isn't impudence!" cried the latter. "Fancy that beast Isaacs daring to show his nose here again!"

Mr. Manson appeared and shook hands with his guest, and as the carriage drove round to the stables the little party came towards the pavilion.

"Are you ready?" asked Gardner, coming up to Linward at that moment. "Come along then. 'Mack' has given orders that we are to play to win, and we have no time to lose."

As they walked towards the pitch an encouraging cheer came from their comrades, and Gardner took the opportunity to give his companion some useful hints.

"Play Brown carefully for an 'over' or two," was his advice, "till you get your eye in; after that you will find there is little in him but his pace. Anthony is much more dangerous, and breaks both ways, but I fancy he might be knocked off his length. There is a nasty patch of turf up at the road end that needs watching. Back up well, and we'll try and steal some runs."

As before, Brown took up the attack, but from the outset Gardner met his fast deliveries with

confidence. "Over" at last, and now it is Stanley's turn. As the field changed, the lad had time to notice that his uncle, with the visitors, had reached the pavilion, and had taken up a position to watch the game. Next moment he was taking guard, amidst a dead silence, before facing the bowler. Anthony's first ball beat him completely, but luckily missed the wickets; the second was a trifle short, and like a flash he pulled it round and scored 2, while the spectators thundered applause at his initial success. The rest of the "over" was played with safety, and then Gardner at the other end began to open his account. The score mounted very slowly, and the batsmen pursued their policy of tiring the bowling.

The Penang players began to get impatient, thinking that their opponents were playing for a draw, and Brown was urged "to plug 'em in." The latter responded with some wild efforts, and opening his shoulders, Stanley drove him twice for 6 right over the hedge into the tennis court. Wild cheers greeted his feat, while at the other end Gardner kept up the enthusiasm by hooking and driving Anthony for 2 and 4. The fast bowler was taken off, and the change had the effect of slowing down the run getting; but soon the batsmen were at work again, and the score rose rapidly. Fifty appeared on the board, but immediately afterwards Gardner was

snapped at wickets for a capital innings of 31. Loud applause greeted his return to the pavilion, and Macandrew took his place without loss of time. Ill luck still dogged the home captain, for just when he had got into double figures, and seemed well set, an appeal for lbw. was given against him. Two for 84; there was still a big leeway to make up, and the fall of the next two or three wickets would probably decide the issue of the match. The Penang captain, realizing that the game might still go against him, requisitioned Brown once more as Menzies took his place at the crease. The burly Scotsman had received orders to force play, and followed his instructions to the letter. In his first "over," amidst a hurricane of applause, he scored 16, his last hit, a terrific pull, crashing into the pavilion and nearly braining the American Isaacs. Stanley followed suit, cutting and placing with beautiful precision, and the spectators in the pavilion made themselves heard as the score rose by leaps and bounds. Bowler after bowler was tried without success, until an ill-fated ball landed on the bad patch of turf Gardner had spoken about and caused Stanley's downfall. His fine innings of 63 had been made without a chance, and the Penang team joined in the magnificent reception he was accorded.

"Well played indeed, my boy," said his uncle,

clapping him on the back; "I had no idea you were such a good cricketer. It was lucky for Sumatra that the doctor turned up in time this morning! Come along now, and let me present you to the sultan."

Hastily donning his blazer, the lad followed his uncle to the place where his guests were seated.

"Tunko Sultan," said Mr. Manson in Malay to a distinguished-looking young man in native costume, "may I present to you my nephew Stanley Linward, who has just come out from England on a visit?"

"*Salamat!*" said the sultan cordially, holding out his hand, "I am glad to meet you. Your uncle has been explaining to me this game of ball, and I understand you have run more than any of the others."

Stanley managed to stammer out a few words in reply, not quite picking up all that was said to him, when a tall European standing by came forward and held out his hand, saying, "Shake! My name is Hiram K. Isaacs. I guess you play this cricket as well as any Britisher I have seen, though it seems poor stuff alongside our baseball."

Young Linward shook hands somewhat stiffly, for he felt an instinctive dislike to this stranger, whom he knew to be the cause of his uncle's troubles. As soon as he could do so without seeming rude, the boy

moved away under the plea of watching the game, unconscious of the keen, searching look with which the American followed his retreating figure.

The game had meantime reached a point of absorbing interest. Menzies had just been caught for a hard-hit 36, and the score stood at 148 for four wickets. Dr. Lipsham and the remaining batsmen each contributed a few runs, so that when the last wicket fell the board showed 188, leaving Penang 115 runs to get to win. Hot and tired, the fielders crowded into the pavilion, where Mr. Manson presented them in turn to the sultan, after which they were served with refreshments. Macandrew got his men together at once and led them out, being anxious to utilize every minute of daylight that remained. The visiting captain kept to the previous order of going in, and, as before, the first pair scored steadily, and 20 was on the board before a wicket fell. Haviland got to work at once, being evidently determined to force the pace and put the issue out of doubt. Macandrew rang the changes on his bowling, but all to no purpose, and at length, in despair, called upon Linward.

"Do you bowl at all?" he asked. "If you feel quite fit, do have a go at this end and see if you can separate these fellows. Place the field as you like."

As the lad sent down a few balls to "loosen his

arm" Dr. Lipsham, who kept wickets, growled something about "refusing his permission;" but no one paid any attention, and the doctor was far too keen a sportsman to carry out his threat. Stanley was a medium-pace bowler, with a useful off-break, and used his head in varying his pace and pitch. His first over was a maiden, but it served the purpose of letting him find his length, and when he faced Haviland again he felt that the match depended on his efforts. By bitter experience he knew the effect of the patch of bad turf at the road end, and now he determined to make full use of his knowledge. The first ball was fast and straight, but Haviland met it so sharply that mid-wickets had difficulty in saving a run. With the same action Stanley sent down a slow, which hung for an instant as it landed. Haviland played forward as before, but this time was a trifle too soon. The ball rose gently, and the bowler, dashing up the pitch, just managed to grasp it with one hand. "Out!" A yell of delight came from the planters, and cries of "Bravo, Linward!" "Well held!" Two wickets for 78. Could they do it? The odds were against them, but this last success infused a new spirit of enthusiasm amongst the fielders, who grew keener than ever, heartened by the obvious difficulty with which the batsmen met Stanley's bowling. Playing on the treacherous patch

of turf, he had the defence completely "stuck up," and wicket after wicket fell in quick succession.

At the other end the Penang men made the most of their chances, and the score crept slowly up. Six for 97, seven for 99. Would the light last? Eight for 102, nine for 107. Seven to make to tie, 8 to win! Only 1 was scored from Middleton's bowling, and as the field changed over the Penang captain called to his men to be steady. A breathless silence fell as Stanley started on his run. Crack! and a great shout rose from the pavilion as the ball shot past cover-point with a fielder in hot pursuit. Four times the batsmen sped down the pitch, and Penang had crept to within 2 of the planters' total. Stanley walked back preparatory to taking his run, and as he did so he signalled to Gardner, who was fielding over-head, to come in closer. Then he turned, and running up to the wicket, delivered the ball with his usual easy action. Crack! and again the shout went up from the pavilion, to be followed suddenly by a dead silence, then a yell more exultant than ever, this time from the fielders; for Gardner had brought off a splendid catch, and Sumatra had won a most exciting match by 2 runs!

CHAPTER VII.

THE SULTAN'S DISCOVERY.

THE dinner which Mr. Manson gave in the evening, after the match, was a great success. The Penang eleven, like thorough sportsmen, took their defeat in good part, and promised their hosts a warm reception when they met again next year in the return match. It was Stanley's first experience of a big Eastern dinner-party, and apart from the fact that he was treated as the hero of the day, the event was one which dwelt long in his memory.

The dining-hall was brilliantly lighted with lamps, and the glare served to throw into greater relief the dense darkness of the night outside. The folding doors at both ends were flung wide open, and during the intervals in the conversation the merry chorus of insects rose loud and insistent. The lengthy table, with its snowy linen, glittering silver, and clusters of strange, tropical fruits, was a wonderful sight to the lad, who had been brought up in somewhat straitened circumstances; and the variety of

costumes lent an additional air of picturesqueness and romance to the scene. The Bekoeda assistants wore the usual planters' evening-dress of white trousers, white cut-away jacket, and cummerbunds of dark red, and their attire made strong contrast with the sober, full-dress black worn by the Penang visitors and Mr. Manson. The sultan, seated on his host's right in the seat of honour, appeared in the full-dress uniform of a Dutch native officer. Over the navy-blue cloth trousers he wore, as prescribed by his religion, an attenuated *sarong* or native skirt, which showed only slightly beyond the closed blue jacket with its gold facings. The close-fitting forage cap, never removed in public by a Moham-medan, was adorned in front by a large diamond ornament, and completed his attire. A small gold locket and several handsome rings were all the jewellery he displayed. His swarthy Javanese attendant stood at attention behind him, and served up the dishes, which were specially prepared for his master by a Mohammedan cook. The silent Chinese boys, their heads shaved and pigtails adorned for the occasion, glided noiselessly round serving the courses; while two *oppases*, stationed outside, pulled the punkah with a slow, rhythmic movement. The American Isaacs took a prominent part in the talking, his manner being noisy and

boastful, while the amount of wine he consumed was considerable.

When the toasts of the evening had been given, Mr. Manson suggested that some of the younger members of the party might adjourn to the clubhouse close by and take advantage of the other billiard table there.

Stanley rose at once, and was joined by Gardner, Menzies, Haviland, and others, while, just as they were starting, Isaacs announced his intention of accompanying the party.

"Now, young fellow," he said, hooking his arm in Linward's as they left the house, "we can have a chat together. I guess we kind of cotton to each other somehow."

The feeling was certainly not reciprocal; but as it was impossible to state this fact to his uncle's guest in so many words, the lad remained silent.

"Yes, whenever my eye fell on you I said to myself, 'That is a young fellow you must get to know, Hiram K.' Living with a sultan is all very well in a way, but it gets lonely sometimes without a white man handy to speak to. Now, I guess you and I would get along first-rate—have much the same interests and hobbies and all that sort of thing. What do you think?"

"I really don't know," replied Stanley, somewhat

embarrassed. "I have been such a short time out in Sumatra that I have no hobbies, as yet, and I think that planters find that their work takes up most of their time and interest."

"That is just where they make a great mistake, especially in a country like this, where there is such scope for instructive and amusing studies—botany, for instance, natural history, coin-collecting, and many others. During the last year or two I have gone in for collecting native weapons and curios of all kinds, and have scraped together some good specimens."

For all the assumed carelessness of his manner, Stanley fancied that he could detect an eager note in the speaker's voice, as if he were on the brink of some discovery; but for the life of him the lad could not imagine what it could possibly be: and further conversation was put an end to by their arrival at the club-house.

A game of billiards was soon in progress, and Stanley managed to elude his uncongenial partner by taking a seat next Haviland; but once, when he happened to glance round, he found the American watching him in a keen, though at the same time furtive, manner. As he glanced at Isaacs' profile again, the feeling came over the lad that the American's form was oddly familiar, but he was

unable to recall where he had seen him before. At the conclusion of the game others were arranged; but the American steadily declined to take part, openly stating that he would prefer to continue "his interesting conversation with his young friend," and poor Stanley again found himself cornered.

"As I was saying," Isaacs began, in his nasal twang, crossing his long legs and slowly puffing at his cigar—"as I was saying, you will find curio-collecting extremely interesting. Have you ever done anything in that line?"

"No; I used to collect stamps, but got tired, and swopped them for a cricket bat.—Good shot, Kottman!" added the lad, joining in the general applause as the Dutchman brought off a good cannon.

"Well," went on Isaacs imperturbably, "I should be very pleased to show you my little lot if you care to come over to the sultan's palace some day. I have one or two trifles quite worth seeing, such as a belt made of coins belonging to an ancient Indian dynasty, and a curious golden drinking-goblet of Spanish workmanship. These were both found buried in the ground close to the hills."

"Indeed, I should like very much to see your collection," replied Stanley, interested in spite of himself.

"Then I have several Chinese josses with quaint

histories which would amuse you. By-the-bye, there was a rumour that you had obtained possession of some joss with a sinister story attached to it—a snake or centipede or something of that sort carved in stone, which is supposed to bring bad luck to its owner. Perhaps you will let me see it?”

The man spoke in an easy, offhand manner, but again there was a note of suppressed excitement in his voice which showed that his carelessness was merely assumed. Stanley started in surprise, and glanced at his companion, who was flicking the ash off his cigar with seeming indifference. So the story of his lizard was known! How had Isaacs heard the tale, and what was his object in asking to see it? The whole affair appeared inexplicable, unless Swee Boo were making inquiries. And yet his uncle had stated that they knew nothing about it. Could Ah Tjew, the Chinese boy, have spoken about the joss? If so, who had told *him*? Stanley's thoughts went back to the night of his arrival and the figure he had seen entering the jungle: perhaps the clue lay there. But in any case it was clear that further secrecy about the matter was unnecessary and useless. He was about to make some reply to his companion's question when they were joined by Gardner.

“We have finished our match, Mr. Isaacs,” he said.

"Will you not have a game before we go back to the house?"

"Ah, thank you, no," drawled the American, looking round insolently. "The fact is, I do not care to play with beginners."

Gardner flushed angrily. He himself made no pretensions to ability with the cue, but there were men present who were regarded as capable performers, and Isaacs spoke loudly enough to be heard all over the room.

"I am sorry we are not up to your standard," replied Gardner, controlling his temper with difficulty; "but perhaps Menzies there, who is our best player, will give you a run for victory."

"Menzies—Menzies," repeated the American, as though to recall the name. "Ah yes, I remember; that is the young fellow who nearly brained me this morning. Well, I shall be glad to give him a lesson," and he looked maliciously at the burly Scotsman, who stood chatting with Kottman at the other end of the room.

Details were soon arranged, and Isaacs, who insisted that the game should be one of 500 up, gave a safety miss to start with. Playing with great care and precision, the Bekoeda man, who carried with him the sympathy of the entire audience, ran up a capital 26 before breaking down. But the

moment his opponent got to work it was seen that the planter had met his match. With an air of indifference, amounting to carelessness, Isaacs manipulated the balls so quickly and with such skill that in a very short time he had amassed 78 before failing at a difficult shot. Menzies kept on doggedly, with the dour determination of his race, never allowing himself to be flurried; but he fell further and further behind, and had not reached the third century when his opponent ran out an easy winner.

"You are far too good for me," admitted the Scotsman frankly, at the end of the game, while the onlookers applauded in spite of themselves.

"That is so," said Isaacs, in his sneering drawl. "I guess you fellows need some one from the U-nited States to teach you how to play at most things."

For a moment it seemed as though this insulting remark would lead to trouble. Menzies took a step forward, his eyes flashing, while several of the Penang men jumped to their feet; but the American himself saved the situation.

"Well," he said coolly, laying down his cue, "I guess I'll go back with my young friend Linward and join his coloured highness the sultan."

Stanley was on the point of refusing indignantly, when he remembered that, after all, the man was his uncle's guest for the time-being; so, bidding a cordial

good-bye to the others, he followed Isaacs, who had departed amidst a profound silence.

On reaching the house they found the party on the point of breaking up; and when the last of the guests had departed, Mr. Manson approached his nephew with rather an anxious look.

"Don't you think you should turn in, my boy?" he said. "You have had a long and exciting day, and Dr. Lipsham left word that you would be wise to get a thorough night's rest.—He is just out of the doctor's hands," he explained, turning to the sultan, "having been stabbed in the shoulder by some unknown ruffian while opening the safe one night."

Stanley happened to be looking at the American while his uncle was speaking, and at the mention of the word "safe" it seemed to him that Isaacs started and looked up quickly as if about to make some remark; but evidently thinking better of it, he turned away to light another cigar. After a few courteous remarks from the sultan expressing his concern at the dastardly attempt, the lad said good-night and retired to his room. He was soon into bed, and, tired out with the day's exertions, fell sound asleep almost immediately.

It seemed but a short time when he half woke, sleepily conscious that some noise had disturbed his

slumbers. At first he thought that Mr. Manson and his guests were still talking downstairs, but gradually he became aware that the sound came through the partition from the next room. Voices were whispering in a tone too low for the words to be distinguished, but presently they ceased, and there came the slight vibration of some one crossing the floor on bare feet. A step creaked on the stairs, and next instant the bathroom door closed softly, and silence fell again.

What could be the meaning of it all? Isaacs the American occupied the next bedroom, and the visitor, whoever it was, must have been in his room. What could be the object of a conversation at such a time, and why should such precautions be taken? Puzzling over these questions, Stanley at length fell asleep again, and did not wake till the sun was well above the horizon.

Dressing hurriedly, he ran downstairs to the hall, where he found the sultan and Isaacs. Almost immediately Mr. Manson returned from the shed, and the little party sat down to table. The American chaffed Linward about his early rising, and the lad retorted by accusing the visitor of keeping him awake during the early hours of the morning.

"It was impossible to get a decent night's rest," he said, laughing up in Isaacs' face; "first of all

for the shouting and singing from the club, and later on for the talking in your room."

The American kept his countenance, but an ugly look came into his crafty eyes.

"So sorry I disturbed you," he replied shortly; "but I am rather given to talking in my sleep."

"And walking too?" suggested the lad. "I thought I heard some one go down the stairs and out at the bathroom door."

"Imagination, pure imagination," answered the other carelessly. "I am afraid your exciting experience in the office has made you rather jumpy at night time."

"Stanley has certainly had rather an unfortunate introduction to Eastern life," interposed Mr. Manson, smiling at his nephew, "and one calculated to make him unnecessarily suspicious; but no doubt he will grow out of that in a short time, and look upon things from a more matter-of-fact point of view."

The lad said no more at the time, though he felt sure that Isaacs had some special reason for concealing the truth, but he resolved to acquaint his uncle with the real facts as soon as the guests left. The American's past history showed plainly enough that he was not to be trusted, and that he was quite capable of treachery even to the man in whose house he was being entertained.

The talk drifted to tobacco and the prospects of the coming crop, and at last the sultan broached the real object of his visit.

"As I mentioned in my letter," he began, addressing his host, "I came to see if we could not come to some agreement about the estate. We have always been friendly, and perhaps a personal interview might smooth matters. If it is not asking too much, could you spare me an hour or two of your time this morning? I must return this afternoon."

"I am quite at your service, Tunko Sultan," replied Mr. Manson gravely. "If you will come into the office now, we can talk there without fear of interruption.—Stanley, will you entertain Mr. Isaacs till we have finished?"

"I guess I'll come with the sultan," interposed the American; adding, with rather a forced laugh, "May help to pour oil on the troubled waters, you know."

Mr. Manson bit his lip with annoyance at this tactless remark, evidently resenting the speaker's unwarranted intrusion; but after hesitating a moment he turned and led the way to the office without further comment.

Left to himself, young Linward put on his topee and sauntered out towards the fermenting shed. He would have liked to have heard the discussion re-

garding Bekoeda upon which so much depended, but he gathered that his uncle thought he was best out of the way, and he himself felt that he could be of little assistance. What a cad Isaacs was, and how he insisted on intruding where he was not wanted! Stanley felt sure that the man was bent on mischief of some kind, and wondered what could be the real object of his coming.

"Hullo, Linward," cried a voice, suddenly breaking in upon the lad's gloomy thoughts, "are you going to spend a morning with me in the shed? Come along and cheer a fellow up a bit!"

Alec Stevens, the speaker, was standing at the door of the shed getting a mouthful of fresh air, and as Stanley approached, he seized him by the arm and dragged him inside.

"Been kicked out," he began again, "while affairs of state are discussed? I say, what a bounder that chap Isaacs is, isn't he? Perhaps," in a more cheerful tone—"perhaps your uncle will let us tar and feather the beast before he gets away."

Stanley laughingly replied that he was sure Mr. Manson would not sanction such a drastic proceeding, and his companion expressed much disappointment.

"Well, in any case Menzies will see that he gets even with him soon," he said at length, brightening at the thought. "He swore last night after you

left that he would repay Mr. Hiram K. Isaacs for all his insulting remarks about Englishmen—Britons, beg his pardon.—“Hi, there,” he shouted to a coolie who was loitering over his task, “get on with your work, or you’ll get a licking!”

The big fermenting shed was getting empty now, most of the crop having been shipped to Holland, but several big staples of sorted tobacco were being “thrown out” according to length, preparatory to baling for shipment. Half a dozen expert workers sat on a low bench with long boards in their hands for measuring each bundle, which was then thrown into certain divisions on the floor marked “first,” “second,” and “third.” The measured tobacco was then picked up by the Javanese women, who carried it to the packers. By the latter it was first weighed and then packed neatly into a hollow wooden box, which was then run under the great press. The coolies seized the four long iron arms and started off, their bare feet pattering on the floor. Gradually the pace grew slower and slower as the strain increased, till a welcome cry from the *tandil* announced that the pressure was sufficient. Tap, tap, went the hammers as the sides of the box were knocked out, skewers were thrust into the cover of matting, the press was reversed, and the bale run out. More Javanese women promptly set to work sewing the

covering, while an old Chinaman stencilled in large letters the name of estate, quality, and length of contents. The bale was then lifted and placed in a long row amongst its fellows, while the same process was gone through with the next. Stanley watched the work with great interest, and was quick to pick up the essential points; but Stevens seemed to find the whole thing merely tiresome, and expressed his relief when the clock struck eleven.

"By-the-bye, I have something to show you," he said, as the two stood watching the natives filing out of the shed for the dinner hour. "I found this in the grass near the *oppas* house when I came down this morning. It's a bit of a curiosity, and might be worth keeping on that account. What do you think?"

He pulled a long, slender piece of metal from his pocket as he spoke, and handed it to his companion, who examined it carefully.

"I don't think it has been long on the ground," said Stanley, turning it over in his hand, "because the rust is easily wiped off, and the steel does not seem to be pitted underneath. It seems to be a dagger of some sort, and looks very like—by Jove! I wonder if it can be the same?"

"The same as what?" asked Stevens.

"Oh, I mean that it looks very like one I have

seen before somewhere," explained Stanley, unwilling to enter into further details; "but perhaps I am wrong."

"You can keep it if you like," announced Stevens carelessly, his interest in his find having evaporated as quickly as it had arisen. "I must hurry up if I am to have a lie-off after tiffin. Hope the negotiations have gone well. Ta-ta."

As he left the shed Stanley's thoughts were busy with the discovery of the rusty dagger. Its shape and size brought vividly to his memory a similar weapon which he had seen thrust through the chink of his cabin door on the night when he had found the jewelled lizard. Could this be the very same dagger? And if so, how had it come where Alec Stevens had discovered it? Macandrew's words to his uncle when he, Stanley, was lying wounded in the porch flashed across his mind, and he shuddered as he fingered the slender piece of steel. The fugitive had "disappeared into the jungle near the *oppas* house," and it was at that spot that the dagger had been found! Could this be the weapon that had wounded him? If so, it seemed only too certain that Mah Peng had been the assailant, and the very thought caused him to look around uneasily.

With these thoughts in his mind he reached the house and entered the office. One glance sufficed

to show him that the interview had been a failure. The sultan sat at the table, his head leaning on his hand, and a troubled expression on his face as his eyes followed the movements of the American, who was pacing nervously to and fro tugging at his short moustache. Mr. Manson stood opposite the door, looking at a large map of the estate which was hanging on the wall.

"No, once for all, I cannot agree to that," he was saying as Stanley entered. "Such a division would leave me with land utterly unsuited for tobacco. As it is, the estate has to be very carefully worked, to mix the poor soil with the rich."

The remark was addressed to the sultan, who looked at Isaacs as if for guidance before replying.

"In that case I fear the matter must remain where it is at present—in the hands of the controller. I hope you will believe me," the speaker continued, in tones which made it impossible to doubt his sincerity, "that I am deeply troubled at putting forward this claim at the expense of one who has always been my friend. If it were not for the unfortunate state of my finances, I should, even now, willingly withdraw."

"I do believe you, Tunko Sultan," answered Mr. Manson, bowing gravely; "and if it were not that my whole fortune likewise is at stake, I would

surrender Bekoeda at the valuation named, and obtain a lease of land elsewhere. I have always found *you* honourable and straightforward in business affairs."

There was a slight accent on the pronoun which the American seemed inclined to resent; but before he could make any remark the sultan rose to his feet, saying briefly,—

"As our attempt at settlement has failed, it is unnecessary that we should presume further on your hospitality. Perhaps you will kindly order my carriage?"

"I hope your highness will at least stay to tiffin," was the courteous reply. "If you leave here by three o'clock, you will be home by seven, and the drive will be cooler and more pleasant."

"I guess that is about the ticket," interposed Isaacs hastily, "and then your nephew can show us the wonderful joss he discovered, right here."

Mr. Manson looked across at Stanley in surprise.

"I did not know that you had spoken to Mr. Isaacs about that matter," he said.

"He seemed to have heard all about it before," answered the lad, resenting the Yankee's cool assurance; "but there was no promise to show anything to him."

"Well, young fellow, I offered to show you my

little lot, and thought you would be pleased to return the compliment. I reckon that is a fair deal. There seems to be something mighty mysterious about this joss of yours, the way you keep it hidden."

"There is no reason why you should not see Stanley's lizard," said Mr. Manson quietly, ignoring the speaker's sneer; "I am at a loss to understand how you came to know about it, that is all.—We are speaking about a curious Chinese joss that my nephew found coming over from Penang," he continued, turning to the sultan, who had resumed his seat at his host's suggestion, and was looking inquiringly from one to the other. "Its history, so far as we are concerned, is briefly this: It belonged apparently to a Chinaman on board the *Avagee*, who was stabbed on the voyage to Belawen, and Stanley found it sticking in some ropes at the vessel's side. In spite of inquiries, we have been unable to trace its owner or any one who can give us information about it. Perhaps it may interest your highness to look at the *chic-chac*."

As he finished speaking, Mr. Manson took out his keys, and unlocking the safe, produced the jewelled lizard. As he did so Stanley's eyes were riveted on the American. Somehow he had begun to feel and understand that there was more in the man's interest in his curio than could be accounted for by a mere

fancy for collecting, and his very eagerness was calculated in some vague way to arouse suspicion. The lad noticed that Isaacs' brows contracted in a puzzled frown as Mr. Manson held up the stone *chic-chac*, and that he turned involuntarily to the map as if for inspiration. Something seemed to strike him; he took another quick glance at the little lizard, and his face suddenly lighted up with a triumphant smile.

Young Linward felt convinced that his suspicions were well founded, and that the Yankee had some deep and underhand purpose in his mind, though what this might be he was unable to guess. Before, however, the boy had time to speculate on this discovery, he was startled by a sudden cry from the sultan, who had risen to his feet.

"Why," exclaimed the latter excitedly, as he scrutinized the lizard more closely, "this diamond is mine! It is one of my stolen jewels!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A CLUE TO THE MYSTERY.

THE sultan's sudden and unexpected exclamation so took his hearers by surprise that for a few moments they could do nothing but stand staring at him in speechless amazement.

"Yes, yes," he reiterated excitedly, examining the jewel closely, "this is one of my diamonds! It was the centre stone of a large cluster that had been in the possession of our race for generations, and which was stolen with all the rest. Of that I am quite certain."

"This is most extraordinary," said Mr. Manson, who was the first to recover himself. "I am glad, indeed, if it is as your highness says; and yet it seems almost incredible that a clue should be found in this strange way after years of fruitless searching."

"Nevertheless it is as I say," repeated the sultan quietly, but with undiminished assurance; "the cutting of the stone is peculiar and unmistakable. Rostheim and Cremer, my jewellers in Medan, will be able to corroborate my statement, as they made

a slight alteration in the setting of this very diamond the day before the robbery." As he spoke he handed the lizard back to Mr. Manson, indicating with a slight gesture that it should be returned to the safe.

The American, who had remained so far a silent spectator, now interposed for the first time. "I guess the safe's the best place for that stone image," he said, with a nod of approval. "And now, sultan, why not go down to Medan right now, and get these jeweller fellows to send a man to identify your stone? Perhaps after that Mr. Manson will consent to hand it over."

Stanley glanced at the speaker in surprise. The words were spoken with little attempt to conceal the covert sneer, but it was not that so much as the complete change in Isaacs' manner that struck the lad as peculiar. Just a short time before he had done everything in his power to persuade the sultan to put off his departure till after tiffin; but now, having seen the lizard, he was evidently fidgeting to get away. After the first puzzled glance, his interest in the joss had apparently died out, while his restlessness seemed to be uncontrollable. His sharp, cunning eyes now scanned the sultan's face with a keen, inquiring look, and again sought the map furtively. More than ever young Linward felt convinced that in some inexplicable way the lizard

was the centre of a mystery unknown to any present except this man, who in some secret manner had obtained a clue under their very eyes, and was now eagerly awaiting the chance of putting it to the test. As these thoughts passed through his mind Stanley became aware that his uncle was addressing him in English.

"You understand what his highness said just now, my boy?" he asked. "He states positively that this is one of his jewels stolen from him in that robbery I told you about the other day."

Stanley nodded.

"I ask you," his uncle continued, "because you found this lizard, and must be regarded as its present owner. For myself, I have no doubt whatever that it is as the sultan says, but you are fully entitled to further proof if you wish it."

"No, I don't want any further proof," replied the lad slowly; "you know the sultan best, and if you are satisfied, then so am I."

Mr. Manson turned to his guest and held out the jewelled lizard.

"Tunko Sultan," he said, "I have spoken to my nephew who found your diamond, and in his name, as well as my own, I ask you to accept it now from us, not as a gift, but as your right."

The sultan's black eyes sparkled as he received

the stone image with its glittering gem, and he thanked Mr. Manson and Stanley warmly for their kindness and generosity.

"I hope to recover some of my jewels through this clue, and if I do so"—he paused a moment, and added significantly, "I shall not forget this action. One more favour you can do me, Tuan Manson, by coming down with me after tiffin to lay the facts before the tuan controller at Bindjei."

After a moment's hesitation Mr. Manson acceded to this request, and as the sultan carefully deposited the lizard in the pocket of his jacket the Chinese boy entered and announced that tiffin was ready.

During the meal the sultan practically monopolized the talking, being brimful of schemes for following up the slender clue which chance had thrown in his way in such a remarkable manner, and confident of the final discovery of his lost treasure.

"I shall give fifty thousand dollars to any one who restores my jewels," he announced to his companions.

"There is a grand chance for you, Stanley," said Mr. Manson, turning to his nephew and smiling; "five thousand pounds would be a nice sum to send home to your mother."

"Indeed, it would," exclaimed the lad, his eyes sparkling at the very thought of such a reward.

His uncle was about to make some further observa-

tion, when he was interrupted by the occurrence of an awkward incident. While passing round the table the Chinese boy suddenly appeared to trip, and endeavouring to regain his balance he clutched wildly at the sultan's tunic. The latter, startled, and his religious instinct enraged at the touch of an infidel, rose hurriedly with an exclamation, while his dusky attendant leapt forward and dragged off the unfortunate boy. Mr. Manson interposed at once, apologizing to his guest for the mishap; and the sultan, grasping the situation, quietly seated himself again, and begged him to say no more about it. His scowling servant, however, was not so easily appeased, and it was only on a stern command from his master that he reluctantly let go his hold of the cringing Chinaman. The latter slunk out of the hall, apparently much upset at the result of his clumsiness, and his place was taken by one of the other boys.

The sultan soon recovered his equanimity, and chatted away with his host; but Isaacs was strangely silent and preoccupied, and Stanley noticed that he paid little attention to the conversation, but sat staring straight before him in an absent-minded manner. When the coffee and cigars were on the table word was sent to the stables for the sultan's carriage, and Mr. Manson, excusing himself for a

moment, went to the office to settle a business matter. Isaacs strolled into the billiard-room, and Stanley found himself left alone with the sultan. Ever since the discovery of the jewelled lizard, the lad had allowed his imagination to conjure up fantastic visions regarding its real significance, and despite of his uncle's matter-of-fact view of the case, he still cherished vague hopes that the little image would yet prove in some mysterious way to be the stepping-stone to fortune. The unlooked-for identity of the diamond, the American's peculiar behaviour at sight of the lizard, and, above all, the offer of such a splendid reward, had stimulated the lad's desire to solve the mystery, and by so doing repay his uncle something of the great debt of gratitude he owed him. Now was his chance to broach the subject, and he was quick to seize it.

"Tunko Sultan," he began, using the form of address he had heard Mr. Manson employ in speaking to his guest, "Tunko Sultan, I wish to ask a favour."

"Yes," replied the Malay, smiling indulgently; "what is it?"

The American could be heard pacing nervously up and down the billiard-room, and the lad hurried on, fearing every moment that he might be interrupted.

"If—if I find your jewels, will you let my uncle keep Bekoeda?"

For a second the sultan did not reply, but sat gazing thoughtfully at the speaker, and Stanley waited breathlessly for his answer.

"Yes," he said at last, very slowly, "yes; if you find my jewels I shall not need the land, and you can claim it from me. I shall not forget that it was through you I obtained this clue." He smiled, and put his hand in his tunic as he spoke; but as he did so a look of astonishment suddenly appeared on his face. He thrust his hand into his pocket and gave vent to an ejaculation of surprise and dismay.

"What is it?" asked the English lad, who had not failed to notice the action.

"The lizard!" gasped the sultan; "it is gone!"

"Gone!" echoed Stanley, in blank astonishment—"impossible!"

"What is impossible?" asked Isaacs, coming back into the dining-room just in time to catch the last word.

A sudden thought flashed through Stanley's mind, and he threw a searching look at the American. Could Isaacs be responsible for the loss of the lizard? His behaviour all through tiffin had been peculiar—as if something were weighing on his mind—and from the first he had expressed his conviction that the *chic-chac* was liable to be lost unless deposited again in the safe.

"The sultan has just discovered that the lizard

is gone," replied the lad, watching the effect of his words with curious eyes.

A look of baffled rage and dismay passed over Isaacs' face. "The lizard gone!" he shouted. "Where has it gone? Who has taken it?" He gazed wildly round, as though expecting to see the thief making off with his booty, and the lad felt instinctively that his surprise was genuine.

"What is the matter?" asked Mr. Manson, coming out of his office and looking inquiringly from one to the other.

"The jewelled lizard, Uncle Ralph," cried Stanley. "The sultan says it has disappeared."

"Disappeared!" repeated Mr. Manson incredulously; "how could it disappear? Has it not fallen out of your pocket, Tunko Sultan?"

The latter shook his head, reiterating mechanically, "No; it is gone!"

"It seems extraordinary," said Mr. Manson in perplexity, looking under the table as he spoke. "It is not there, and it is certainly not lying in the office, or I should have seen it just now. We must see into this at once.—Boy!"

A Chinaman came running at his call.

"Where is Ah Tjew?" asked Mr. Manson; "send him here immediately."

"It is stolen, I tell you," repeated Isaacs excitedly,

while the sultan continued to fumble in his pocket, as though still hoping to come across the little image. Stanley sat gazing blankly in front of him, hardly yet able to realize that at one blow all his hopes were shattered.

"I can't think what has come over Ah Tjew," exclaimed Mr. Manson, with annoyance, as the minutes passed and no one came. "Boy!" he called again more loudly.

There was no response; but after another and more peremptory summons, whispering was audible in the outer passage, and the same Chinaman entered again with a scared face.

"Where is Ah Tjew?" demanded Mr. Manson angrily; "send him here at once, as I told you. How often am I to call you?"

"*Tuan*," replied the frightened Chinaman hurriedly, "Ah Tjew is not here."

"Not here! Go and find him immediately, and send him to me."

The fellow turned away, and then hesitated as though about to speak, but Stanley forestalled him.

"Gone!" exclaimed the lad excitedly—"Ah Tjew gone! Then he is the thief.—Don't you see, Uncle Ralph, he has made off with the lizard?"

"By Jove! I guess the youngster's right," said the American.

"But how? When?" asked Mr. Manson, in bewilderment.

"Just now, at tiffin," replied his nephew quickly, the whole truth dawning on him as he spoke—"that stumble of his was just pretence to give him an excuse for rifling the sultan's pocket. You remember how he clutched the jacket as he fell forward."

"The beggar knew the lizard was there too," ejaculated Isaacs, pacing the floor in great agitation; "he came in to announce tiffin just as his highness was putting the thing away in his pocket."

"Has Ah Tjew run off?" asked Mr. Manson abruptly, turning to the Chinaman.

"We think so, *tuan*," was the reply. "We cannot find him anywhere, and no one has seen him since he left this room."

"Ah! then he had better be found at once."

Stepping to the door Mr. Manson blew loudly on his whistle, and an *oppas* came running up to the house.

"Ah Tjew, the Chinese boy, has disappeared," the man was told briefly, "and must be found and brought back. Send out your men in search of him at once."

As the Sikh hurried off to obey his orders the sultan's carriage drove up to the door, and Mr. Manson returned to the dining-room to inquire if his guest wished to postpone his departure in view of the latest development.

"Your carriage is at the door, your highness," he said, "and I shall be glad to accompany you to Bindjei if you still wish it; but perhaps you would prefer now to wait a little. I have given orders that Ah Tjew must be found and brought back at once; and if it should be true that he has taken it, I hope you will soon be in possession of your jewel again."

The sultan's complete collapse under the unexpected blow had come as a revelation to Stanley, unaccustomed as he was to the Asiatic temperament; and now the calm way in which he spoke of his jewel as irrevocably lost came as an even greater surprise.

"I should prefer to go down and see the tuan controller now," was his reply to Mr. Manson, "if it is quite convenient for you. No doubt the boy is far away by this time with the diamond, but we have at least discovered a clue to my treasure."

"I am quite at your service," said his host at once. "I have great hopes that the lizard will be found on the boy; and if that is so, my nephew will bring it down to us at once. Probably I shall stay the night with the controller," he added, turning to Stanley, "and you might send an *oppas* down about seven to let me know if there is any news. The English mail should be in to-night, and no doubt you will get letters that will help to pass the evening. Send for Macandrew or Gardner if any trouble arises; I

leave any further directions for the search entirely to you."

"And to me," broke in Isaacs. "I shall stay and help my young friend. I can be of no assistance at Bindjei, and I guess I know where that boy of yours is making tracks for. I bet he won't fool Hiram K. Isaacs twice."

The American spoke in English, but the sultan seemed somehow to divine the drift of his remarks, and addressed him at once as if in reply.

"I want you to come with me to Bindjei also," he said, moving towards his carriage. "You are quick to think, and will help us to trace my jewels; and when they are found I shall not forget your services—nor yours," he added, turning to Stanley, and shaking hands warmly.

"What do you mean by saying you know where the boy is making for?" Mr. Manson asked, gazing at Isaacs in a thoughtful manner.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," replied the latter hastily, pulling his topee well over his eyes. "The fellow is sure to make for the jungle—up-country, of course."

Without making any reply Mr. Manson followed the sultan into the carriage, while Isaacs turned to shake hands with Linward.

"Good-bye, youngster," he said; "I'm sorry his dusky highness insists on my going with him. You

and I would soon have laid salt on that yellow boy's pigtail, I guess;" and shrugging his shoulders, he turned and followed the others.

"Good-bye, Stanley," called Mr. Manson as the horses started; "I'll be back to-morrow some time. Don't look so upset."

He spoke in some surprise, for the lad was gazing after the departing carriage with staring eyes and gaping mouth, as if he were struck dumb. His uncle's words seemed to reach him from a great distance, and he hardly heeded them, so absorbed was he in the startling discovery he had just made—a discovery which explained many of his doubts and suspicions, and yet left him more mystified than ever. As Isaacs turned to enter the carriage, the lad's glance happened to rest for a second on the back of his big solar topee, and like a flash the recollection of the American's identity which had been haunting his mind came back to him. Just above the dark blue pugaree on the right side of the white hat was a peculiar burnt mark in the shape of a half moon there could be no mistaking, and which Stanley had noticed once before—at Medan station.

So Hiram K. Isaacs was the European he had watched from the railway carriage—the companion and instructor of the villain Mah Peng! His brain whirled at the thought, and before

he could grasp the situation the carriage moved off, and all chance of communicating the intelligence to his uncle was lost for the time.

Entering the office Stanley seated himself at the table, and leaning his head on his hands proceeded to think out the meaning of the discovery.

That Isaacs had known all about the jewelled lizard from the first was now quite clear, and his prearranged meeting with Mah Peng at Medan threw a most sinister light on his character in view of the tragic occurrence on board the *Avagee*. That he had been an accomplice in a robbery, if not a murder, was hardly open to doubt, and that the lizard was the aim and object of his desires was equally evident. The words, "the *chic-chac* tells," recurred to the lad with a new meaning as he remembered Isaacs' puzzled looks; and then the triumph that plainly showed itself in his face when the lizard had been produced from the safe! What had it told him? The American had seemed to consult the map; and following his example the lad gazed fixedly at it, but without result. It conveyed nothing to his mind but the fact that Bekoeda was a very large estate to search for Ah Tjew with the stolen lizard.

Thinking of the boy brought forward a new problem. Was Ah Tjew acting under Isaacs' orders; and if so, why was the American so upset when the theft was

discovered? Looking back in the light of his latest discovery, young Linward felt convinced that his suspicions of Ah Tjew had been well founded, and that the Chinaman had harboured designs against the lizard from the beginning. But from whom had he gained his knowledge? If he were in Isaacs' pay, why had the American allowed himself to be fooled so simply? And, again, *was* he fooled? What had he meant by blurting out that he knew where Ah Tjew was making for? It all seemed a hopeless tangle; and, to crown all, came the sultan's assurance that the jewel set in the lizard was one of those stolen years ago on the road from Medan. Could he possibly be mistaken, or was this really a clue to the lost treasure? If so, what was the meaning of Isaacs' glance at the map of the estate? The jewels might be somewhere on Bekoeda—actually close at hand! His heart leaped at the thought that he had only to read the riddle aright, and discover what "the *chic-chac* tells," to stretch out his hand and grasp a fortune. The lad was still dreaming of the glorious possibility when one of the Chinese servants entered.

"Tea is ready, *tuan*," he announced quietly.

"All right," replied Stanley absently; and then, rousing himself, he asked with more interest, "Ah Tjew, the boy, has not returned?"

"No, *tuan*, he has not come back, and the *oppases* are still away."

"Let me know if you hear any news," said the English lad as he seated himself at the table.

He did not linger over his meal; his mind was too much preoccupied, and soon he was back again in the office carefully examining the map on the wall. He had been engaged in this manner for some time, and was still hoping against hope that by some lucky chance he might stumble across a solution of the riddle, when a step was heard on the gravel outside, and he went to the door, expecting news of the runaway. A tall *oppas* approached, and saluting gravely, handed him a large tin box. The lad gazed at it blankly, and the Sikh, seeing his perplexity, came to the rescue. "The post, *tuan*," he announced respectfully.

Why, of course! How stupid of him not to remember that his Uncle Ralph had said the English mail would probably be in that night. Taking down the key from the peg where it always hung, he unlocked the box and tumbled out the contents. There was quite a lot of letters for Mr. Manson, one with the Singapore stamp marked *urgent*; and placing these aside, along with two addressed to himself, he put the rest back in the box, which he returned unlocked to the *oppas*.

"Tuan Stephens, Road I," he said; "he will tell you where to go next."

"Very good, *tuan*," returned the impassive Sikh; and slinging the strap once more round his shoulder, he set off up-country at a swinging pace with no sign of fatigue, though he had been walking most of the day.

Watching him till he was out of sight, Stanley sat down to read his letters. Looking at the superscriptions he saw that one was from a school chum, Harry Travers, and the other was from his mother. He took up his chum's letter first, reserving Mrs. Linward's as a *bonne bouche*, and tearing open the envelope was soon engrossed in the contents. Harry was no great writer, and his sprawling caligraphy was difficult to decipher, but Stanley eagerly followed the jerky sentences and halting phrases. It was mostly about cricket and football matches that his friend wrote, with here and there a passing reference to work; but all through Stanley felt that his old companions had not forgotten him, and his heart warmed at the thought.

"Fancy losing to the college by 115 runs," he muttered; "'we missed you badly, both in batting and bowling.' How I wish I had been there! 'We started the football season by drawing with the High School—two goals one try each. If you

had been playing, we should have won; though Pilkington, who took your place at half, played well for a go off.' Little Pilkington! fancy him in the first XV."

Travers wound up his letter by expressing the hope that the revolver they had presented had "turned out useful," and that they would hear soon from him.

"Useful! Dear old Harry! he little knows *how* useful it has proved once already. I only wish these customs fellows would hurry up and let it through. Now for the mater's letter!"

Mrs. Linward gave minute details of their life at home since her last letter, and Stanley in his mind's eye could follow the doings of his mischievous little sister Agnes, of Martha the old family servant, and of all his many friends in the little village. "Buller" the old retriever had, it seemed, missed his master very badly at first, and was only now beginning anew to taste the joys of life—such as a midnight poaching expedition or an hour's ratting in the barn. Throughout the four closely-written sheets the lad felt how his mother's love went out to him, and how she longed and yearned for him. Never once did she use a complaining word or hint at difficulties; but Stanley's eyes grew dim and a lump rose in his throat as he conjured up the dear home scene, and pictured the quiet figure in black bravely facing the

world, and making the best of it for the sake of those she loved.

"Every one has been so good and considerate to us," she ended by writing, "that really it would be impossible to tell you half their kindnesses. Mr. Oliver, your father's solicitor and old friend, has been down several times to visit us and find out if we were quite comfortable. He brought Agnes such lovely presents, and only yesterday I had a letter from him to say that he hoped, after all, that the money left would be enough to pay off outstanding debts, and leave us with sufficient income to live on. Last mail your Uncle Ralph sent me a cheque to provide for your sister's education; and though I am writing to thank him, I hope you will show by your conduct and actions how much we appreciate his great kindness and generosity. And now, my dear boy, I must finish this long letter. Take care of yourself, and do your duty always. That you should grow up strong and manly like your dear father is the great hope and wish of your loving mother."

Darkness had fallen by the time Stanley had finished reading the letter, but he made no movement to rise, and sat on staring before him with dimmed eyes. The soft evening wind rustled in the palm trees and fanned his cheek, a cicada near by started its loud, discordant noise, but he paid no heed. His

thoughts were far away with those he had left behind in the Old Country, and a flood of tenderness and regret surged up in his heart as he realized that very soon he might be forced to return to England, having failed to accomplish anything to assist his mother or repay his uncle. He groaned as he thought of the cruel position in which Mr. Manson was placed, and clenched his hands in despair as he dreamed of what might have been. A Chinaman entered the dining-hall at his back, and striking a match, lit the large centre lamp.

The light, shining through the half-closed doors, fell upon the map hanging on the opposite wall. Hardly conscious of what he was doing, Stanley sat staring idly at this patch of whiteness which showed up in strong contrast to the surrounding gloom. Suddenly, however, he roused himself with a jerk, and sat bolt upright in his chair and gave vent to a smothered exclamation of surprise. He rubbed his eyes and looked again.

"The *chic-chac*," he muttered excitedly—"the jewelled lizard!"

He sprang to his feet, and with beating heart approached the map. No, his eyes had not deceived him, and he realized with a thrill of exultation that at last, when he least expected it, he had stumbled across a clue to the mystery.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LIZARD TELLS.

TREMBLING with excitement, Stanley rose to examine the map more closely, and as he did so the sound of footsteps approaching fell on his ear. Pausing irresolutely, he stood listening for a moment before calling to the Chinaman in the next room to bring a lamp. The fellow obeyed at once, and when he had gone young Linward stepped to the door and looked out. Beyond the circle of light cast by the lamps everything was swallowed up by the dense tropical darkness. The lad peered in the direction whence voices could now be heard, trying in vain to pierce the gloomy pall. Had Ah Tjew been captured, and were they bringing him back with the stolen lizard? In the still, clear atmosphere sounds carried a great distance, and it seemed to the impatient listener that he had waited ages before several white figures suddenly emerged from the outer darkness and approached the office. He saw at a glance that these were the *oppases* who had

been sent in pursuit of the Chinese boy, and at the same moment he noted that they brought no prisoner.

"Ah Tjew!" asked Stanley eagerly, as the Sikhs saluted, "have you heard or seen anything of him?"

"Yes, *tuan*," answered Mahdo, the head *oppas*; "we found the boy Ah Tjew, but he was dead."

"Dead!" repeated the lad, in dismay. "What happened to him? Where did you find him?"

"Near Road IV., *tuan*," was the reply. "I had just asked Tuan Middleton's coolies if they had seen Ah Tjew, when the *tandil* of *Kongsie* 9 told me he had observed a Chinaman on the road shortly before. The *tandil* thought he had disappeared into the jungle on the opposite side from the tobacco fields, and pointed out the place."

"Yes, go on," said Stanley—"you found him?"

"Not at once, *tuan*. Looking about for some mark to show where the boy had left the road, I discovered a path used by Malay hunters, and followed this into the jungle for some distance, but was about to turn back, thinking I was on the wrong track, when I came to a small stream, on the muddy banks of which were the fresh imprints of footsteps. On crossing over I saw at once that the man whom I had been tracking had been attacked by some one as he left the water, but in spite of this had evidently managed to win his way on to firmer ground.

Clambering up the bank I almost stumbled over something white lying on the ground, and stooping down, discovered it to be the body of Ah Tjew, the Chinese boy. A small wound over the heart had evidently proved fatal, and there were several wounds on other parts of the body, which was still warm."

The Sikh told his gruesome story with the stolid callousness of his race, but Stanley shuddered as, in imagination, he pictured the tragic scene.

"Did you find anything else?" he asked at last, not liking to describe the lizard minutely; "had Ah Tjew nothing in his pockets or clenched in his hands?"

"In his hands nothing, *tuan*; yet his right hand was torn and cut, as if he had held something in it which the unknown murderer had tried to wrest from his grasp. In his pockets I found—these;" and the *oppas* held out some objects for the lad's inspection as he spoke.

Linward looked closely at them, and a feeling of intense pity for the poor Chinaman swept over him at the sight. A Chinese key, two or three copper cents, a slender opium pipe, and a small pouch of tobacco: that was all; but it brought home to the English lad the tragic fate of the poor Chinese boy more vividly than could any words.

"Was there no clue to the murderer?" he asked

fiercely, forgetting the lizard in hot anger at the cruel, cold-blooded crime; "surely he must have been close by!"

"Yes, *tuan*, he could not have gone far," replied the *oppas*; "but in the jungle what can a man do?" He spread out his hands with a gesture of impotence, and the lad felt the truth of his statement. "When I saw that Ah Tjew was dead," continued the man, "I went farther on to see if there were any signs of his murderer; but all was silent, and there were no tracks to follow beyond the spot where the boy lay. Seeing that pursuit was useless I turned to retrace my steps, when something lying at the side of the path glinted in a ray of sunshine which came through the trees, and stooping down I picked up—this."

The *oppas* fumbled in his *sarong*, and Stanley's heart beat high and fast with excitement. Had the sultan's diamond been recovered after all? Next second, however, his hopes were dashed to the ground, for Mahdo held out, not the jewelled lizard, but a thin piece of steel. Disappointed, the lad merely glanced at it, and was turning away, when a sudden thought struck him, and he looked more closely at the object in the Sikh's hand. Yes, there could be little doubt. Twice already he had come across a similar weapon, and once before it had been dyed, as was this one, in the life-blood of a man.

Taking from his pocket the slender dagger that Stevens had found, he placed it alongside the other, shuddering as he realized how narrow had been his own escape.

"Why, they are alike!" exclaimed the *oppas* in surprise, gazing curiously at the two deadly little pieces of steel, "but they are not Malay *krises*. Does the *tuan* recognize them?"

"Yes, I think so; and if any of you catch sight of a big Chinaman with a scar across his face, seize him at once. Now give me back the dagger—no, no, not that one; it must go into the safe with Ah Tjew's possessions. There!" he went on, as he turned the key, "I am going to telephone to Tuan Manson. Send your men off to get their dinner—I may want to send one of them down to Bindjei. Stay here yourself until I find out what the *tuan* wishes."

Turning to the telephone he called up the exchange at Bindjei, and asked to be put on to the controller's house; while, at a word from Mahdo, the Sikhs quickly melted into the darkness.

"Is that the controller's house?" asked Stanley.

"Yes, *tuan*," came the faint response.

"Ask Tuan Manson of Bekoeda to speak to me."

"Tuan Manson is not here. He came down with the Sultan of Lankat, and they went away together. Tuan Manson—"

"Is the controller there?" called the lad impatiently; "I want to speak to him."

"No, the tuan controller was called down to Medan this afternoon. Are you Tuan Linward, Bekoeda?"

"Yes."

"Tuan Manson asked me to telephone to Bekoeda to say that he had gone to spend the night with the Tunko Sultan. To-morrow he will return to meet the tuan controller here."

"Then why didn't you do as he told you at once?" asked the lad angrily; but before he could give further vent to his annoyance the receiver at the other end was hung up by the discreet native.

Thus unexpectedly cut off from his uncle and left to his own resources, young Linward surveyed the situation and came to a rapid conclusion. His presence in the manager's house was no longer a matter of great importance, as Mr. Manson was beyond telephonic communication; and if his theory were correct, as he felt sure it was, prompt action was necessary to save his uncle's fortune, and at the same time make his own. Mr. Manson had advised him to consult Macandrew and Gardner in any difficulty, and a crisis that brooked no delay had arisen. He would go to Gardner and explain his great discovery at once. Calling to the head *oppas*, he seated himself at the table, pen in hand.

"Tuan Manson is not with the tuan controller," he explained, "but has gone to spend the night with the Tunko Sultan. He will return to Bindjei tomorrow, and I wish to send him several letters."

"Very good, *tuan*."

"I am going up to Road VI. to stay with Tuan Gardner, and may possibly be there for a day or two. Till Tuan Manson returns you must take charge of this house and see that nothing is stolen. Tell the syce to bring round the buggy at once."

Mahdo retired to do his bidding, and Stanley went on with his letter to his uncle. Beginning by telling him of the discovery he had made of Isaacs' identity with the European he had seen at Medan station, he proceeded to describe Ah Tjew's untimely fate, and his own conviction that Mah Peng was again the murderer. He merely hinted at the startling revelation that had come to him so suddenly and unexpectedly when staring at the map, by saying that he hoped after all the lizard might be induced to tell its secret. If so, it would probably be determined within the next two days, and he was going up to spend the night at Road VI., and consult Gardner. As he closed and sealed the letter, the buggy drove up to the door; and calling Mahdo, he gave him final instructions.

"Here are the letters for Tuan Manson," he said,

handing the *oppas* that written by himself and the others which had arrived by the English mail; "send one of your men down to the tuan controller's house with these to-morrow morning without fail. You understand?"

"Yes, *tuan*."

"Very well then. Take great care of this house, and see that one of the Chinamen answers if the telephone rings. Tuan Manson will come back to-morrow night, and if you want any instructions before that go to Tuan Stevens."

He stepped into the trap and took the reins; the syce sprang up behind and they were off. It was the first time Stanley had driven by himself at night, and he revelled in the novel experience. The horse, a raw-boned Australian *waler*, was very fresh, and pulled fiercely at the bit as though rejoicing in the thought of a run in the cool, fresh air. In a few minutes they tore past the *kongsie* house all ablaze with light, and through the open shutters Stanley caught a glimpse of Alec Stevens sitting at the dinner table. The road lay straight before them, gleaming white under the rays of the newly-born moon, which cast weird shadows from the trees on either side. The *waler* shied violently at a great palm leaf lying in the way, and it took the driver all his time to curb the animal's eagerness. Fireflies flashed

lazily here and there, and the rustle of animal life stirred the jungle. Now they were abreast of the hospital, and Stanley shivered as he remembered the still, quiet form resting there, and his thoughts turned to the mystery surrounding the jewelled lizard. Had he read the riddle aright, and was he on the eve of its solution? Isaacs apparently fancied that he had guessed the secret, but Isaacs was far away. From the American with his shrewdness and trickery the lad's thoughts turned to Mah Peng, whose sinister and mysterious personality had seemed, like some cloud, to overshadow all his doings since the moment when he had first discovered the lizard. What of this cruel, vindictive Asiatic? Was he in time to forestall the villain?

A herd of wild pig ran squeaking and grunting across the road, and again the horse swerved; but the pace was beginning to tell, and it soon settled down into a steady, swinging trot. Road IV. was passed, and the voices of Macandrew's coolies, chattering over their evening meal, could easily be distinguished. Toot! toot! came the far-away echo of a horn on a neighbouring estate, and looking in that direction Linward noticed a dull red reflection in the sky. "A drying shed on fire," the lad remarked to the syce, as the distant sound of many horns joining in the alarm came to their ears. Entering the belt

of jungle lying beyond Road IV., all sounds seemed deadened save the rhythmic thud of the horse's hoofs and the incessant chorus of insects. Just before turning down Road VI. the *waler* shied again slightly, and Stanley fancied for a moment he saw a dark form glide across the track just ahead; but as they passed the spot he was unable to make out anything against the dark background of trees, and he thought no more of the incident as he slowed down to take the sharp turning to the right. The pace slackened as they bumped over the uneven planting road, but the lamps in the house ahead shone as a beacon, and soon the wooden bridge rattled under the wheels of the buggy as it turned into the entrance, and Mike the terrier's voice rose in a barking challenge.

"Down, Mike, down," shouted Gardner, throwing open the door and appearing at the top of the stairs. "Who is it? You are very welcome, whoever you are. Linward! By Jove! that is splendid. You're just in time for dinner—come along."

As Stanley dismounted, Mike came trotting down to inspect the arrival, and gave vent to a series of delighted yelps as he recognized a friend.

"Give the horse a rest, and then drive back slowly," called Linward to the syce; adding to Gardner as he ran up the steps, "I've come to

offer myself as a guest for the night, if you'll have me."

"Rather! that's better still. Of course, I'm only too delighted to have you.—Boy!" he shouted, as the syce led the steaming horse to the stables, "Tuan Linward has come to dinner and will stay the night."

"Very good, *tuan*," answered the boy from the kitchen with as little concern as if a dozen guests more or less made no difference to him.

"Cut along and have a tub and get into a suit of my pyjamas," said Gardner, leading the way into his room. "Dinner will be ready as soon as you are, and the boy will make the spare room habitable afterwards. You must be sharp-set after your drive, and we'll have a cosy evening together."

"Right, O!" was the response. "I won't be five minutes, and there is a lot to tell you."

"Now, then, I'm ready to hear all your news," commenced Gardner a little later, as they sat at the table, with Mike the terrier at their feet and the Chinese boy silently serving them. "I can see from your face that you have something on your mind. Mr. Manson all right, I hope?"

"Yes, he's all right, but went off with the sultan and Isaacs this afternoon, and won't be back till late to-morrow; hence my visit."

"A lucky chance for me; I was just looking

forward to another lonely evening when you turned up. Starlight, my old horse, has gone dead lame, and so I'm pretty well tied down at present. But out with your news—I'm dying to hear about it. Has the sultan come to terms?"

"No, not yet. There is just a chance he may, however, and it is about that I have come to consult you."

"At your service, sir; but why do you think we can work the oracle?"

"Because," said Stanley slowly, laying down his knife and fork and staring at his host, "because I believe I have discovered the secret of the jewelled lizard!"

"The jewelled lizard! Your old joss! What on earth has that got to do with the Sultan of Lankat's claim?"

"Everything, I hope. But it is a long story, and I had better begin at the beginning and tell you all that has happened since I saw you last."

"Fire away then."

Going back to the day of his arrival, Stanley gave a detailed account of the origin and growth of his suspicions regarding the conduct of the Chinese boy Ah Tjew, and of his recent conviction that the lizard was in some way responsible for the attack upon himself in the office. He mentioned the curious

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feeling he had experienced with regard to Isaacs, as if he had met him before, and related his attempts to gain information about the joss, and his peculiar behaviour when at last it was produced. The sultan's announcement that the diamond was one of his lost jewels drew a surprised "Oh!" from Gardner, who grew visibly excited when he heard of the sudden disappearance of the lizard and Ah Tjew's subsequent flight.

"There seems to be something in your idea after all," he exclaimed; "but what puzzles me—"

"Wait a bit," said Stanley, interrupting; "there is more to come." He went on to describe the scene which followed the discovery of the theft, and his own amazement when he recognized in the departing Isaacs the European who had consulted with Mah Peng at the station in Medan.

"The blackguard!" shouted Gardner, thumping the table with his fist, to the surprise of the boy and the manifest delight of Mike, who added his voice to the din; "to think that he had the impudence to force himself on your uncle after that!"

When Mike had been quieted, Stanley continued his narrative, describing the finding of Ah Tjew's body as related by the *oppas*, and his own conviction, based on the finding of the dagger, that Mah Peng was responsible for the crime.

"By Jove! it does seem like it," ejaculated his host, as the lad paused for breath; "but still I can't fit the thing together, and our chance of getting at the sultan through his diamond seems further off than ever, now that the thing is doubly lost.—Be quiet, Mike," he continued, addressing the terrier, who had risen and was growling uneasily with nose in the air.

"I am not yet finished, however," replied Stanley impressively; "the most important part of my story remains to be told—at least the part *I* consider most important, and on which our future success with the sultan entirely depends. After tea I was sitting in the office when the *oppas* brought in the post from Bindjei. The English mail was in—by-the-bye there are some letters on the way to you now—and there were two long home letters for me. When I had got through them it was nearly six o'clock, and the sun was just setting. I was dreaming of home and my old school when one of the Chinamen entered the hall to light the lamps."

"Well," interrupted Gardner impatiently, "that's not very extraordinary. Most fellows are pretty home-sick when they come out first. What are you driving at now?"

Stanley had risen, and was clearing away the dishes on the table in front of him. For a minute or so he made no reply, but busied himself arranging

the knives and forks in a careful and deliberate manner, while his companion watched him with a perplexed and questioning look.

"There!" he said at last; "all I want now is the backbone of the thing." He looked round the veranda, and his eye fell on Gardner's bamboo cane standing in a corner. "That will do; please hand it to me."

In bewildered silence Gardner did as he was requested, and Stanley carefully placed the cane in position before him.

"Now come round here to this side," he commanded.

His companion obeyed, wondering what was coming, and beginning to suspect that Linward had got a touch of the sun.

"I told you about the map of the estate my uncle had hung on the wall," the lad went on. "I happened to be facing it as I sat at the table, and when the Chinaman lighted the lamps a ray gleamed through the half-open office door and fell full upon it, and instantly the secret of the whole mystery flashed across my mind. See! this stick represents the main road running straight through Bekoeda from end to end, and these knives and forks at right angles represent the planting roads. Do you understand now?"

Gardner shook his head. "I understand the map of the estate well enough, but beyond that it beats me."

"Why, man, can't you see? can't you guess?" exclaimed Stanley excitedly—"the jewelled lizard is an exact imitation of the map!"

"Great Scot! I do believe you're right," ejaculated Gardner, light dawning upon him at last.

"Right! Of course I am—I *must* be right. Look! here is the body of the *chic-chac*, and here are the legs sticking straight out. Why should there be six pairs of them instead of two, and why did Isaacs turn from the lizard to consult the map?"

"But then, again, if he knew the lizard represented the map of the estate, why did he need to see it?"

"To find out the spot where the sultan's jewels are hidden, of course. Don't you remember how I happened to overhear the conversation at Medan station and the words 'the *chic-chac* tells'? The beggar knew the treasure was somewhere on Bekoeda, but didn't know exactly the spot."

"Neither do we, so far as I can see. Bekoeda is a pretty wide word."

"But I *do* know!" exclaimed Stanley triumphantly—"that is just the point. *The diamond was put in to indicate the exact spot.*"

For a moment Gardner stood open-mouthed gazing at his companion, then suddenly smote the table with

his fist till the dishes rattled, and fell to thumping Linward on the back.

"Splendid!" he shouted, in his excitement; "you're a perfect Sherlock Holmes. To think I've been living within a few hundred yards of this treasure all the time without knowing it! We'll bag the sultan's reward and save the estate yet, my boy! I hope it is still there though," he added, as an afterthought.

In their excitement the lads scarcely knew how to contain themselves, but their attention was diverted to other matters by the furious barking of Mike and the sound of a voice calling from outside.

"Quiet, Mike—down, sir," said his master, opening the door and looking out. "Ah! it is the *oppas* with my letters."

The Sikh, a tall, ghostly figure in the rays of the lamp, saluted respectfully, and handed over his charge. As he turned to retrace his steps, the Bekoeda buggy came round from the stables, and Stanley called to the syce to give the *oppas* a lift. The man quickly clambered up behind; but the horse refused to move on, in spite of all its driver's efforts.

"What's wrong?" called out Gardner from the top of the steps.

"The horse is frightened at something, *tuan*,"

replied the syce, after another vain effort to get his steed to cross the bridge.

Gardner ran down the stairs with Mike at his heels, and taking the animal by the head coaxed it on to the road. For a minute or two it jibbed obstinately, and then suddenly flinging up its head with a frightened snort, it bounded forward and broke into a furious gallop. Gardner just managed to jump clear of the wheels, and returning to the house he and Linward listened to the rattle of the rapidly-departing buggy.

"They have got safely round the corner, anyway," remarked the former, as the sound of the wheels ceased for a moment and then started again. "The horse was in a perfect lather of fear, and there seems to be something uncanny in the air. Look how uneasily Mike is sniffing and growling."

The little terrier was trotting about, never venturing far from the house, as if seeking the protection afforded by the lights. Now and again he would pause, and lifting his nose in the air, growl suspiciously, till at last, tucking his short tail between his legs, he fairly bolted up the stairs. Both the English lads burst out laughing at the comical sight, while Mike crept close to them as if in mute appeal.

"What's gone wrong with you, Mike, eh?" said his master, stooping to pat his favourite.

Next instant his question was answered by a loud roar which came from the back of the house and startled the inmates.

"A tiger, by Jove!" exclaimed Gardner, his eyes sparkling with excitement, "and close too. The brute must be just behind the stables."

Frightened voices from the kitchen and furious stamping from the stables proclaimed the fact that the occupants, two legged and four, were aware of the nature of their unwelcome visitor.

"Come into my room and we may get a shot," cried Gardner, taking down a couple of rifles, and handing one to Stanley—"this is a sporting Lee-Metford and that is a Martini." He led the way to his room as he spoke, and throwing open the shutters the two lads peered out into the night.

The window faced south towards the main road, and to the right the jungle lay dark and silent, with the great *twalang* towering aloft in its majestic height. To the left lay the planting road, gleaming white here and there where the young moon's rays shone coldly through the tops of the trees, and it was in this direction that the young Englishmen turned their gaze.

"I believe the beast has been stalking the *oppas*," whispered Stanley, slipping in a cartridge.

As if in reply, an answering roar of defiance came

from the jungle between the house and the main road. Starlight stamped again furiously, and the syce could be heard endeavouring to calm him.

“He’s moving down towards the Malay *kampong* on Middleton’s division,” said Gardner, breathing hard in his excitement; “keep a good look-out on the road in case he crosses.” Immediately afterwards he gripped Stanley’s arm, and whispered, “Look! just beyond the shadow of the *twalang*, one hundred yards—”

Another roar drowned the rest of his sentence, and upon it, loud and despairing, out of the still night rose a man’s piercing cry.

For a moment the two lads stood horror-stricken, then with a loud shout Stanley leapt across the room.

“Come on! the brute’s got somebody,” he cried; and followed by Gardner, with Mike barking at his heels, he tore down the road, rifle in hand, regardless of danger.

CHAPTER X.

THE FINDING OF THE TREASURE.

THE cry which startled the two lads had died away, and not another sound reached their ears as they raced down the road. Stanley was tearing along, regardless of danger, when a deep growl sent a cold shiver down his back and caused him to pull up abruptly. He gripped his rifle nervously, and glanced round at Gardner, who had halted a pace behind him.

"Watch out," whispered the latter, peering ahead; "the brute must be quite close somewhere. I wish that cloud would pass away and let us see clearly."

The moon had, unfortunately, become obscured at the critical moment, and without its rays the tables were completely turned, and the hunters had the uncomfortable sensation of being forced to play the part of the hunted. Mike had ceased barking, and cowered at their feet whimpering uneasily, hair on end. Not a sound came from the darkness ahead, and as the minutes passed the strain became intolerable.

"Hist! did you see something there just now?"

whispered Gardner at last; "I thought I saw a dark shadow creeping along."

"No," replied his companion, in the same cautious tone, "I saw nothing; but there is a heavy smell like a menagerie—do you notice it?"

"Look!" said Gardner excitedly, pointing to the left, "do you see that? The brute is stalking us!"

Stanley gazed in the direction indicated, and it seemed to him that he could dimly make out a large black patch, darker than its surroundings, with two baleful, gleaming eyes, while at the same time he became conscious of a deep, low noise like the purring of an immense cat. Mike backed away, growling fiercely, just as Gardner dropped on one knee and levelled his rifle.

"It's going to spring! Be ready in case I miss," he whispered; and next instant he fired.

Simultaneously with the explosion came a loud roar, and a huge black mass came hurtling through the air. Instinctively Stanley threw up his rifle and pulled the trigger, leaping aside as he did so. His foot caught a rut in the road, and he fell forward as the tiger landed with a thud on the very spot he had just quitted. The brute's savage growling sounded close in his ear, and he felt that his last moment had surely come; but as he leapt to his feet a loud report rang out, and the vicious snarling suddenly ceased.

"A near shave that," commented Gardner coolly; "if you hadn't wounded him badly with that lucky shot, it would have been all up with one of us."

"Did I hit him?" gasped Stanley breathlessly, feeling rather dazed and shaken. "It was impossible to aim properly in this light, and I hardly knew what I was doing."

"Well, at any rate, you did the trick," was the reply; "and I fancy your shot must have blinded the brute, or it would never have stopped crouching there, snarling and tearing the ground as it did."

Stanley looked down with awe, mingled with pride, at the body of the great cat lying at their feet, with Mike sniffing cautiously round about it.

"I wish it was light enough to let us see the beast," he said, "but we can't wait here till the moon clears. That poor wretch we heard screaming must be close at hand. I'll give a call. Hullo!"

They stood straining their ears to catch the faintest response, but none came, and after a second attempt they gave it up as useless.

"It's no good," said Gardner at last; "we must get a lamp and make a proper search. Just wait a bit, though, till I look over there where the tiger sprang from. There's an open space just at that spot, and his victim may be lying unconscious. Here goes."

He moved forward as he spoke, and stepping cautiously over the ditch at the side of the road, soon disappeared into the surrounding gloom.

After a few protesting whimpers of remonstrance Mike followed his master, and Linward was left alone standing beside the dead tiger. It seemed to him that he had waited a long time, and he was just about to call to his friend, when a shout reached his ears.

"Linward!"

"Hullo! Where are you?"

"Here; come and give me a hand."

Without further delay Stanley jumped the ditch and made his way in the direction of the hail, and in a few minutes came upon his companion, who appeared to be stooping over a dark form lying on the ground. Gardner rose as he approached, and ordered off Mike, who was growling round the prostrate figure.

"He's still alive," he said, in answer to his companion's query, "but I can't make out whether he is badly mauled or not. By some lucky chance I stumbled right over the poor beggar."

"Who is it? Is he one of your own coolies?"

"I can't tell in this light. He is evidently a Chinaman, from the pigtail. The sooner we get him to the house the better. Catch hold of his feet, and I'll take his arms. Now then!"

Slowly and with great difficulty they carried their inanimate burden to the road, and after a short rest resumed their journey to the house, with the terrier trotting alongside. Not a word was spoken till the steps were mounted, and the wounded Chinaman deposited on the floor of the front veranda.

"Shut up Mike in my room," said Gardner, heaving a sigh of relief; "he seems to have taken a dislike to this poor wretch, and may sample him with his teeth if we don't look out. I'll look over the fellow and find out what's wrong." He picked up a lamp as he spoke, and approaching the Chinaman, knelt down by his side and began his examination.

Stanley found it no easy matter to follow out his directions with regard to Mike, who evinced the liveliest dislike to the wounded man; but at last he managed to hustle the terrier into the bedroom, and returned to the veranda.

"Doesn't seem much wrong after all," grunted Gardner, continuing his work; "the left arm is badly chewed, and there is a nasty scalp wound, but beyond that I can find no injury unless it is internal. I fancy the fellow is suffering more from fright and the violent shake when he was pounced upon. I'll give him a little brandy, and see if that won't bring him round."

The Chinaman was lying on his back quite unconscious, and the blood from the wound on his head,

which had run down over his face and chest, gave him a horrible, gruesome appearance. After a quick glance Stanley was averting his gaze from the ghastly sight, when he gave a sudden start, and next moment a startled cry burst from his lips.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Gardner, rising quickly, "what's wrong? Are you upset at the sight of the blood?"

"No—no," replied Linward, his staring eyes fixed on the unconscious coolie's face, "it's not that. Don't you see who it is? We have rescued Mah Peng."

"Mah Peng!" was the puzzled rejoinder; "who on earth is he? Oh!" as the truth dawned on him, "you mean the wretch who tried to stab you? By Jove! that's queer. What can he be doing here?"

"Searching for the jewels, of course! He would come straight here after robbing Ah Tjew and—"

Stanley broke off suddenly, and flinging himself on his knees seized hold of Mah Peng's right hand.

"What on earth are you after now?" cried Gardner in amazement. "I should have thought there was little love lost between you and this scoundrel."

Stanley made no response, but proceeded with difficulty to force open the Chinaman's clenched fingers. Succeeding at last, he rose to his feet holding aloft something which flashed and sparkled in the light of the lamp.

"The jewelled lizard!" he cried exultantly.

"My eye, what a splendid diamond!" exclaimed Gardner, lost for the moment in admiration of the gem. "The lizard—so it is! We are evidently on the right track. Hullo!" he added, breaking off, "our friend is coming to his senses; and seeing he is so handy with his knife, I'll just tie him up a bit."

He picked up a leather belt as he spoke and bound the Chinaman's legs together; then with some strips torn from an old shirt he bandaged the wounded arm in such a way that the man was practically helpless.

Hardly had he finished his task when Mah Peng gave a groan, and opening his eyes, looked round him vacantly. For a moment or two his mind was evidently a blank, but as his gaze fell on Stanley the dull stare gave place to a gleam of baffled fury, and he made a fruitless effort to rise.

"No, no, none of that!" said Gardner sternly; "we know your playful little ways only too well, my beauty, and you'll get no opportunity of practising them here.—Boy!" he called loudly; and with an answering "*Tuan*," his servant speedily made his appearance, rubbing his eyes sleepily.

Pointing to the wounded man on the floor, Gardner informed the boy that he was to take charge of him, and then proceeded to sketch Mah Peng's character in forcible and lurid language.

"Till he leaves this place you will be responsible

for him," he finished by saying. "I shall look after his wounds myself, and on no account are you to loosen his bonds. Once he is free he will certainly cut off your head, burn the house, and run off with all your belongings."

The boy listened open-mouthed to this terrifying statement, and the scowling look he bestowed on his prisoner boded ill for that truculent scoundrel. The two English lads then picked up the helpless Mah Peng, and carried him down the stairs to the boy's room beside the kitchen at the rear of the house, and deposited him on the floor. Then feeling pretty sure that for one night at least their enemy was safe, they returned to their own apartments. As they passed the stables, Gardner stopped to give an order to the syce.

"I've just told him to look after the tiger, and see that the skin is not spoilt by ants or animals. It would be a great pity if you were to lose your first trophy."

"*My trophy!*" exclaimed Linward; "it was you who killed the beast."

"That doesn't matter. The man who plants the first shot gets the skin."

"It's awfully good of you," protested the delighted Stanley. "My mater will be immensely proud of it. But now let's get a lantern and have a go at that

treasure. I can't rest quiet when I know that it is hidden so close at hand."

"You'll just have to try then," said Gardner, with a laugh, "or go yourself. I don't move a step until to-morrow. A lantern indeed! Search the jungle for a spot you haven't fixed, by the light of a lantern! Why, man, it's sheer nonsense!"

"Perhaps it is a bit stiff," admitted Stanley reluctantly, "but suppose it is carried off during the night—"

"It will be carried off by spooks or fairies then," returned his companion, "for we've got the only possible human thief safely tied up. No, no, the jewels are safe enough; we must get to bed and have some sleep. I've got to pay the coolies to-morrow, and then, if you like, hey! for the hidden jewels. There's Mike yelping like blazes! No wonder he took a dislike to your friend Mah Peng. He knew what he was about!"

After a few further expressions of anticipation for the treasure-hunt on the morrow, the two tired lads sought their respective couches and were soon fast asleep—Stanley with the precious lizard safely tucked under his pillow.

The sun was streaming into the house next day when they woke; for, being pay-day, work was suspended, and the only business was the paying of the coolies during the morning. The boy reported

that his prisoner was safe, and after dressing they paid him a short visit. Gardner unbound the injured arm, and having dressed it, replaced the bandages carefully. He next attended to the scalp wound, being rewarded for his ministrations by a sullen scowl; and having told the boy to feed the wounded man with a little rice, the two English lads proceeded to enjoy their own breakfast.

"Extraordinary how tough these natives are," remarked Gardner, as he knocked the top off his second egg; "they recover almost immediately from injuries that would be fatal to most Europeans. So far as my slight knowledge of surgery goes, that beggar Mah Peng will be quite fit again in a day or two. His wounds have healed marvellously during the night even, and as for shock—well, these men have no nerves to speak of at all!"

"You don't mean to say he will be able to get about and do more mischief before we hand him over to the authorities?" asked Stanley in astonishment, as he helped himself to another cup of tea.

"That's exactly what I *do* mean," was the reply; "these Asiatics are made quite differently from white men. Why, I've seen an *oppas* taken to hospital with a slice off the side of his head, hanging over his ear, and the blood spurting from a small artery, and yet within the week he was back to work!"

"Horrible," said Stanley, shuddering at the thought.

"Yes, it was rather a beastly sight," admitted his companion; "even Dr. Lipsham was astonished at his quick recovery, because he assured me there was a chip actually taken out of the skull by the blow. But here comes Hassan; now we'll hear if your skin is all right."

The syce saluted respectfully, and in answer to questions, informed his hearers that the tiger's skin was intact except for the hole by which the fatal bullet had entered, Stanley's shot having blown a big hole between the eyes.

"Ah, that's just what I thought," ejaculated Gardner, "and accounts for our escape. The sooner the beast is skinned the better, especially in this sweltering weather. I shouldn't wonder if we have a big thunderstorm soon, it is so stuffy."

Hassan announced that he knew an old Battak hunter in the neighbouring *kampong* who was skilled at this work, and would be willing to undertake the job for a few cents. Accordingly he was sent off, with instructions to bring his friend at once; and meantime Gardner prepared to pay his coolies, who were already assembling outside. A table was placed across the doorway leading into the veranda, and Gardner, having produced a bag full of dollars from a small safe in his room, took up his position

behind this, seated in a chair with his pay-book open beside him. Before starting payment he called up his *tandils*, and informed them that his friend, Tuan Linward, who was a mighty hunter, had shot a tiger a short distance up the road, and any one who was found interfering with the dead animal would be severely thrashed. This statement was received with loud "Wahs!" of astonishment, for the coolies held tigers in great awe.

"It's lucky none of these beggars have been at our prize already," explained Gardner to his companion, "or the skin wouldn't be worth much. Not that they value it for its own sake, but such trifles as the tip of the tail, whiskers, ears, claws, etc., are highly thought of as 'medicine.' As it is, they anticipate some rare tit-bits, such as the heart, which is supposed to make the man who is lucky enough—or unlucky enough—to sample it exceptionally strong and brave. With your permission I'll bestow it on Cha Bo, my oldest *tandil*."

This he proceeded to do, and Stanley could hardly restrain himself from laughing outright when he saw the look of ineffable pride and delight which spread over the old fellow's face at the news. Then the paying began. As each *kongsie*, or gang, came forward, the *tandil* in charge took his place at the top of the steps beside the table and called out the

coolies' names in rotation. Each man mounted the steps, and received from the Englishman a certain sum as an advance on the tobacco which he would produce from his field during the coming season. In a wonderfully short time the hundred odd coolies were paid off, and the men dispersed, to employ themselves as they liked for the rest of the day.

"It looks as though we shan't get started on that treasure-hunt before tiffin," remarked Gardner, looking at his watch; "it's 9.30 now, and here comes Hassan with his hunting friend. I think we had better see the skinning process fairly started, in case the man is unfit to make a good job of it. What do you say?"

Stanley was burning with impatience to begin the search for the sultan's jewels, and throughout the morning had kept his hand constantly in the pocket where the precious lizard lay; but he recognized the force of his friend's suggestion, and having agreed to his proposal, the little party proceeded to the scene of the previous night's adventure. Here they found a crowd of coolies gathered round the tiger's body, with old Cha Bo in their midst. The dead animal lay right across the road, and Gardner at once gave orders that it should be lifted over the ditch to the side. This was successfully accomplished by the united efforts of the coolies, who gave vent to many an astounded "Wah!" as they staggered

under the great weight. The old Battak hunter then proceeded very deliberately and methodically to commence his task amidst the admiring gaze of his audience. The tiger was a young one, not yet fully grown, but its skin was in splendid condition, and Stanley looked with pride and wonder at the great cruel fangs and long curved claws.

"What did you agree to pay him?" he asked, indicating the busy Battak with a nod of his head.

"Fifty cents and some powder and shot. Not ruinous, is it?"

Stanley laughed, and the two stood watching the native until Gardner announced that it was time to return for tiffin. Before he went he informed Cha Bo that, barring the skin, the body of the tiger was entirely at his disposal, to distribute amongst the coolies as he liked. This announcement evidently was received with much satisfaction, rather to Stanley's disgust.

"They surely won't eat the flesh, will they?" he inquired, as they made their way back to the house.

"Some of them probably will," answered his companion; "a certain class of Chinamen called Maccows will eat practically anything. The rest will secure a bit for the purpose of making it into 'medicine.' Now then for a bath, and during tiffin we can discuss our plan of campaign."

"My idea is that the jewels are buried just at the junction of Road VI. with the main road," began Stanley, as he took his place at the table a little later, "and we should have little difficulty in hitting upon the spot."

"I don't know that," replied his companion doubtfully; "the jungle is pretty dense in bits just at that corner."

"Of course we'll have to take a *parang* to clear our way, and a *chancol* to dig up the treasure when we come upon it."

"You seem mighty certain about finding it," laughed Gardner; "do you expect to be guided to the spot by instinct—or what?"

"By some mark," was the confident reply; and taking advantage of the Chinese boy's momentary absence, Stanley whipped the imitation *chic-chac* out of his pocket. "Just look at that point sticking up beside the diamond! You don't suppose that was left there by mistake?"

"No, probably not. There is something in that certainly; but you don't understand yet how quickly marks decay in this country or get obliterated by the tremendous growth of the vegetation."

"Well, well, we shall soon see. Are you nearly finished yet? I am dying to be off."

"Right you are! If you look out the *parang*

and *chancol*, I'll go and have another look at our friend Mah Peng."

"The beggar's as hard as nails," Gardner announced, as, fully equipped, they stepped on to the road; "his wounds are healing rapidly, and the boy says he's always asking for food. I've purposely starved him a bit to keep down his exuberant spirits. Whew! how hot it is."

The fierce rays of the midday sun poured down from a cloudless sky upon the white, dusty road. The two Europeans felt baked before they had gone twenty yards, and Mike, who had set out gaily to accompany them, hesitated, and finally trotted back to the shelter of the house, with lolling tongue and heaving sides. The coolies were all within doors eating their dinner, and only the old Battak was left by the side of the road, placidly continuing his work, with an ever-increasing swarm of flies and noxious insects buzzing round him.

"Faugh!" spluttered Stanley, putting his handkerchief to his nose, "it's just as well you insisted on having the skin taken off at once. There wouldn't have been much of the beast left by to-morrow!"

"No; this climate plays the very dickens that way, but to-day is specially sultry. I expect my syce will come in for a drenching before he reaches Bindjei. He has gone to bring up a new set of harness for



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"Hands up, both of you!"



me to-morrow; but I smell a thunderstorm, and shouldn't wonder if we have it hot and strong before night."

"All the more reason to get started as soon as possible," was Stanley's only reply, as he quickened his pace.

Arriving at the main road they halted, and the jewelled lizard was again produced for a final inspection.

"Not much more to be learned there," said Gardner, handing it back to his companion. "I think your original plan is best, to work our way backwards and forwards between the two roads for a hundred yards or so, and in that way we are bound to come upon any mark that may exist."

"Come on then," was the reply; "it will at least be cooler out of the sun." As he spoke, Stanley jumped over the ditch, and Gardner at once followed his example.

The patch of jungle at the corner was soon searched without result, and the two lads, as the angle widened between the roads, began to make longer journeys from side to side. Stanley soon perceived that his estimate of the magnitude of their task had been far short of the reality; and even the idea of coolness had been delusive. The sun's rays certainly did not penetrate the luxuriant mass of foliage, but the atmosphere, though damp,

was terribly close and oppressive. The English lads worked with a will, and Linward's evident excitement stimulated the energy of his comrade. Backwards and forwards they went, cutting and tearing away obstacles that barred their way, tripping and stumbling over roots and creepers, but ever peering about on the alert for anything that might prove a clue to the discovery of the lost jewels. Once Stanley, who was leading, pitched forward suddenly with a cry of surprise, and would have gone head-long into an old, disused well if his companion had not seized him in the nick of time. Another time Gardner sprang back quickly, and with a warning hiss a great brown cobra glided away from the noisy intruders. Backwards and forwards they worked, slowly but surely covering the ground, till at last, panting and perspiring at every pore, Gardner flung himself on the ground as they emerged once more on Road VI.

"It's no go, old chap," he gasped; "worse than looking for a needle in a haystack."

"I'm not going to give in yet," said Stanley stubbornly; "another tack will bring us past the *twalang*, and it can't be more than eighty yards or so from the point where the roads join."

"It's no use, I tell you," replied Gardner; adding quickly, as he noted the look of bitter disappointment

on his friend's face, "But there is a better plan. I was a fool not to think of it before."

"What is it?" asked Stanley eagerly; "out with it."

"It's just four o'clock now," said Gardner, looking at his watch, "and I'm going home for a cup of tea. After that," he went on, raising his hand to stop his comrade's indignant protest, "I shall have a quiet little chat with Mah Peng, and see if I can't squeeze some information out of him."

"I thought of that before," said Stanley, rather doubtfully, "but can't see how we can force him to talk."

"That is the difficulty," admitted the other, "but an idea just occurred to me to try a dodge I once heard of. A Dutchman up-country suspected his Chinese boy of stealing a valuable diamond pin, but was unable to bring the theft home to him. He tried thrashing the beggar, but he was quite accustomed to that; and at last, in desperation, his master threatened to cut off his pigtail unless the diamond pin was produced there and then. Thereupon the boy, evidently in abject terror, produced the pin from the sole of his Chinese shoe, and then straightway went and hanged himself!"

"It seems an effective measure at all events," said Stanley, more hopefully; "but why should it frighten them so?"

"Ah! that I don't know. I believe it implies that they have cast off allegiance to their emperor,

and are unable to go back to China unless they wish to be tortured—or something of that kind. Anyway, we can try the dodge on Mah Peng and see the result. If he happens to go and hang himself, it will be no great loss. Come on !”

Picking up their implements the two lads, dirty and bespattered with their hard work, made for the house. Here they were uproariously greeted by the unabashed Mike, while the boy soon placed a steaming tea-pot before them.

“ Ah ! that is refreshing,” exclaimed Stanley, emptying his fourth cup ; “ but if you are ready I should like to tackle Mah Peng at once, so that we may have time to-night to follow up any clue we may obtain.”

“ Right O !” replied his companion, setting down his cup. “ We won’t have much time anyway, as my prediction is coming true. The thunder seems to be approaching from the mountains. Listen !”

A distant rumble, increasing in volume before it died away, came to their ears, and a cool current of air stirred for a moment and then ceased.

“ Here ! take this piece of rope and keep it hidden till I ask for it,” said Gardner, as they made their way to the back of the house.

Entering the boy’s room, a glance told them that the prisoner was still secure. Before addressing him Gardner turned to the boy.

"You've been smoking opium again," he said, sniffing the tainted air. "Remember what I told you about your captive, and if you happen to be alive when he's done with you I'll attend to you myself." Then he turned to the wounded man. "I want to know where the treasure is hidden," he began abruptly, "and the sooner you tell us the better."

For a moment Mah Peng's evil countenance remained impassive; then, as the meaning of the European's words appeared to strike him, a vindictive smile of triumph lighted up his features.

"Listen!" went on Gardner; "we know that you have found out where the sultan's jewels are hidden, and we know also that they are close by here."

The smile left the Chinaman's face, and Stanley noted the fact with satisfaction.

"The jewelled lizard," continued the speaker, "told us as much, but we are busy and have no time to search. We come to you, therefore, to learn the exact spot, and in return you may go free."

The impassive yellow face exhibited not a trace of interest at this announcement, nor did the man evince the slightest desire to make terms with his captors.

"Should you refuse our request," resumed Gardner, after a pause, "you will be handed over to the Dutch, and tried for the murder of a Chinaman on board the *Avagee* and of Ah Tjew, Tuan Manson's boy."

A peal of thunder, nearer and louder, warned the English lads that there was little time to lose. Mah Peng remained silent, and Gardner prepared to put in force the Dutchman's threat. He pulled out his watch and held it ostentatiously in his hand, then gazing sternly in the Chinaman's eyes he repeated slowly and significantly, "If you do not tell us what we wish to know within three minutes we shall—*cut off your pigtail!*"

As he uttered this awful threat the boy gave a scared cry, and over the irresponsive features of Mah Peng there swept a momentary look of terror. Stanley's heart beat fast as he watched the struggle depicted in the man's face, but slowly the seconds passed, and there came no response.

"The three minutes are up," whispered Gardner in English, "but I'll give him one more. The beggar's game, though he's evidently in an awful funk. My boy would have caved in long ago.—Time!" he announced at last, snapping to his watch.

Producing a pair of nail scissors from his pocket he knelt beside the prostrate man and held them before his eyes.

"I will give you one last chance," he said solemnly; "will you tell us where the jewels are hidden?"

He paused a moment, but the Chinaman made no response, and in desperation Gardner motioned to Linward.

"Kneel down and stretch his pigtail out behind his head," he said in English, "and hold that piece of rope in your hand as well. I'll saw away at that, and perhaps when the fellow feels the scissors he'll give in. Anyway, it's our last chance."

Stanley did as he was bid, and Gardner plied the scissors to the rope, keeping one eye fixed on his victim's face and purposely taking as long as possible.

"There," he muttered at last, tearing apart the last strand and giving the pigtail a vicious tug as he did so—"there! we've done our worst, and the stubborn wretch has beaten us. Let's get out of this before he discovers we've been fooling."

Rising to their feet, baffled and disappointed, the lads made for the door; and as they went, Mah Peng, silent hitherto, at last found his tongue and burst into a torrent of invective. In silence the two Europeans retraced their steps and entered the house. Gardner flung himself petulantly into a long chair, and Linward moved to the window to conceal from his friend how great had been his disappointment at this miserable ending to all his hopes.

"I'm beastly sorry, old chap," said Gardner at last, breaking the silence; "I really hoped to squeeze something out of that hardened sinner. We must just go over the ground ourselves again to-morrow."

Stanley made no reply. He was gazing out over

the piece of jungle which contained the talisman which would retrieve his uncle's fortunes and bring happiness and prosperity to those he loved so dearly. So near, and yet so far!

At that moment a flash of lightning rent the sky, followed a few seconds later by a loud clap of thunder. Gardner rose and joined his companion at the window.

"By Jove! we're in for a heavy storm," he said, gazing at the dark masses of cloud which were rolling down from the mountains. "Thank goodness that old *twalang* protects us, or this house would stand a poor chance. Just you watch it when the storm reaches us, and you'll see the lightning playing on it like a conductor. It sticks up there year in, year out, the most noticeable mark for miles around."

Mechanically Stanley's gaze fell on the gigantic tree towering aloft in its solitary grandeur. It certainly offered a conspicuous mark, and—why—

"I've got it!" he shouted suddenly, gripping Gardner's arm in his excitement.

"Got what?" asked his companion, in astonishment.

"The clue we've been wanting—like fools!—and it is there under our very eyes! The *twalang*, of course! Come on—quick; bring the *chancol*;" and before Gardner could remonstrate he was down the steps and tearing along the road.

The latter paused only to pick up the *chancol*, and

then followed in his wake. He passed the old Battak bearing the tiger's skin, and shouted to him to take it on to the house. With Mike at his heels he ran on after the white figure in front; but before he could make up, Stanley had disappeared with a leap into the jungle. Coming to the same spot Gardner followed suit without hesitation, guessing well the goal towards which his friend was aiming. Ten minutes later, torn and panting, the two lads met at the foot of the huge tree. Two great roots stretched from the mighty trunk running along the ground for many yards, and in the angle between them lay a piece of bare ground.

"There," gasped Stanley, pointing close to the trunk, and without a word Gardner lifted his *chancol* and fell to work. The wind rustled through the surrounding trees and whistled past the great, gaunt *twalang*, while ever and anon a peal of thunder heralded the approach of the coming storm. Gardner worked with a will, but the soft earth yielded no treasure, and the minutes flew by. A vivid flash, followed by a peal louder than ever, startled the lads, and in the momentary silence that succeeded, the roar of the approaching rain could distinctly be heard.

"We must go," called Gardner, turning reluctantly; "it's not safe here."

"No, no, not yet!" shouted Stanley; "try nearer

the trunk." He seized the *chancol* as he spoke and dealt a random blow. The metal struck something hard a few inches below the surface, and the boy gave a wild yell of triumph. Blow after blow he delivered frantically, till a dark, square box was uncovered. In an instant the two adventurers were on their knees by its side, and a vigorous heave released it.

"Quick!" panted Gardner, "take one side, and I'll take the other. Never mind the *chancol*."

With the precious box between them the lads started for home; and as they did so, a blinding flash shot from the clouds, and the rainstorm burst with all its fury. Dazed and stupefied they staggered on while the wind tore through the trees above. At last the road was reached. Soaked and hatless they splashed through the mud with the cowed terrier shrinking behind, and in time the wooden bridge was crossed and the house gained. Battered but triumphant, they mounted the steps bearing their treasure-trove with them, and as they entered the veranda Stanley could not refrain from giving a cheer.

"Hurrah!" he cried, "we've got the sultan's jewels at last!"

"Glad to hear it," drawled a voice from the lighted room. "Hands up, both of you!"

CHAPTER XI.

TWICE FOILED.

STANDING on the threshold of the doorway the two lads paused irresolutely at the sound of the unexpected command, their eyes dazed and blinking with the sudden change from gloom to glare.

“Hands up!—slick now!” came the threat once more, followed by the ominous click of a trigger being cocked.

Bewildered and taken unawares, there was nothing for it but to comply, and accordingly the two disengaged hands went up in token of surrender to the owner of the pistol.

“Ah! that is better. Now step right in till I tell you to stop, and bring along that interesting trinket box with you.”

The lads advanced as they were ordered, bearing the unearthed box between them; but in a couple of paces they found themselves drawn up by a table stretched across the veranda. By this time their eyes had grown more accustomed to the blaze of

light, and an ejaculation of surprise and disgust rose simultaneously to their lips as they recognized in their unwelcome guest no less a person than Isaacs the American, who now stood facing them, revolver in hand, not ten feet away.

"You don't seem so pleased to see me as I am to see you," he sneered; "and as you have forgotten how to play the part of host, allow me to adopt the *rôle* meantime. Kindly place that box on the table, and seat yourselves beside it—so. Now stretch out your arms in front of you—there. I hope you are quite comfortable, gentlemen."

Fuming inwardly at their utter helplessness his hearers did as they were ordered, their eyes alone telling of their angry resentment, for their tongues seemed tied by the suddenness and completeness of their discomfiture. Isaacs was about to continue his banter when a clap of thunder interrupted him, and as it died away in angry mutterings there came a sudden diversion. Mike the terrier, having escorted his master as far as the steps, had trotted off to the back premises to see what he could pick up in the kitchen. Apparently nothing very substantial or appetizing had been forthcoming, for presently his pattering footsteps were heard, and a moment later he entered the veranda.

"Mike! Here, Mike!" cried Gardner, realizing

the situation, but too late. With a snarl the plucky little beast dived under the table to the rescue of its master, who called again in vain. A well-directed kick hurled it aside, and hardly had it regained its feet when Isaacs' revolver spoke, and all that was mortal of poor Mike lay quivering and bleeding on the floor.

"You scoundrel!—you cruel scoundrel!" shouted Gardner, jumping to his feet, forgetful of danger in his fierce wrath.

"Down!" commanded the American viciously, leveling his weapon at the enraged youth. "Sit down at once, or you share the same fate."

The sight of the glittering barrel pointed straight at his breast, and the wicked gleam in the eye looking along it, gave added weight to the threat, and slowly and sullenly Gardner obeyed and resumed his former attitude.

Isaacs dropped the point of his pistol, and leaning back against the partition, picked up the lighted cigar which he had been smoking.

"I must apologize for this unhappy occurrence," he said indifferently, nodding as he spoke at the terrier's body; "but I am taking no chances now that the game is in my hands, and with two such skilful opponents I guess one has to be extra 'cute.'"

He bowed ironically to the lads, who maintained

a stolid silence, each being preoccupied with his own thoughts. To Stanley the whole affair had been so sudden and unexpected, coming immediately on the top of his triumphant success, that his senses had hardly yet grasped the meaning of it all. So full had been his mind of the anticipated results of his discovery—results which he had fondly pictured as restoring his own and his uncle's fortune—that at first he was incapable of taking in the full measure of this final blow, and only realized dimly that the fruits of success were again slipping from his grasp. With his arms lying listlessly on the table he gazed dully at the muddy, rusty iron box beside him, and wondered vaguely why fate should be so cruel.

Close by sat Gardner on the arm of a long chair, his whole body quivering with passion, and his blazing eyes fixed on the mocking face of the American. All thoughts of the sultan's jewels had been swept from his mind by the tragic end of his faithful little terrier, and he ground his teeth in impotent fury as he silently nursed his revenge. The rain pattered on the leafy roof and the thunder growled at intervals, but the worst of the storm seemed to have passed, and the wind had subsided as suddenly as it had arisen. Isaacs leant against the partition, his right hand carelessly toying with his revolver the while he gazed contemptuously at the two bedraggled figures before him.

"A pleasant little surprise, gentlemen, eh?" he inquired quizzingly, scanning their faces—"and one which it seems you have not yet quite recovered from! Well, well, I am in no particular hurry, and we may have a very congenial chat together."

He took a few whiffs of his cigar, and then resumed,—

"You are no doubt wondering why I should linger here with the booty under my very grasp, but the truth is my horse needs a rest and feed in your hospitable stable before we set out again, and as I am very comfortable—and quite safe, eh?—here, there is no need to hurry.

"I see you quite agree with me," he went on after a pause, a sneering smile on his lips; "and perhaps I can give you some information on points that may have puzzled you. I owe you both something, I guess, for saving me the bother of digging up that trinket box. Really, it astonished me to find that after putting two and two together for several days, you had discovered the result to be exactly four! If I had guessed you were such smart fellows, I should have been much more careful over that map—eh, Linward?"

Stanley nodded in reply. He was recovering from his first bewilderment, and as his mind became clearer his thoughts turned to the chances of outwitting his

keen opponent. The longer the American stayed, the more likely it was that such an opportunity might occur; and the more he talked, the longer he was likely to stay. Then, also, he seemed to be in a communicative mood, and there were points in connection with the jewelled lizard which the lad was anxious should be explained.

Isaacs noted his change in manner, and addressed himself more particularly to him, keeping all the while a watchful eye on Gardner, who was obviously inclined to be dangerous.

"Well, young fellow, you see, after all, I am going to add a new specimen to my collection of curios—ha! ha!" He indicated the iron box as he spoke, and seemed to enjoy his own joke. "If that silly fool the sultan hadn't shouted out when he recognized the jewel in the lizard, you would never have guessed what I was after."

"Why did you ask me to bring it out then?" asked Stanley, eager to induce him to continue his narrative.

"Well, I own up that was a slip on my part; but who would have thought the beggar would have been so nippy? After all these years too! By-the-bye, where is the lizard—was it recovered?"

Hard as Stanley tried to keep his composure, his face must have betrayed him, for with a laugh the American continued,—

"Ah! I see you have it yourself again. I guess I must let you keep it as a beginning for your curio collection—ha! ha!—and as a souvenir of all the exciting times you have come through; and, young fellow, let me tell you you have been very near your end more often, perhaps, than you know."

"Oh yes, but I *do* know," retorted Stanley, acting his part well. "There was the time on board the *Avagee*, of course, and again in the office at my uncle's house."

Isaacs laughed. "I see you know even less than I thought; and as this is the last time we shall probably meet, I'll tell you the history of your jewelled lizard."

Stanley nodded. He dared not speak lest the note of eagerness in his voice should betray him to the quick-witted American; for his object was so far gained, and it lay with himself now to think out some plan by which Isaacs might be foiled.

Before commencing his narrative, the latter turned to a stand on a small table at his side, and with a mocking bow to Gardner helped himself to a glass of spirits.

"To your very good health," he said, raising the tumbler to his lips.

"I only wish it would poison you," growled Gardner venomously, in response.

"Tut-tut, you mustn't bear malice like that. After all, the jewels weren't yours—"

"The jewels!—you can take the jewels and be hanged to you; it's my dog I'm thinking of, you scoundrel!"

"Ah yes, I had forgotten the terrier," Isaacs answered carelessly, setting down his glass; "but you can get another."

The callous indifference of the reply nearly provoked another outburst from Gardner, who, speechless with rage, glared impotently at his tormentor. The rain had ceased, and its monotonous patter had now given place to an uncanny stillness. Not a sound came from the kitchen, where the boy should be preparing the dinner, and a restless stamping from the stables was the only indication of life. The thunder had growled itself out in the distance, but a faint, moaning breeze had suddenly sprung up, causing the doors and windows to creak and rattle.

Stanley's brain was working hard, but as yet he had hit on no plan which offered the slightest chance of success. The table had been drawn away from the walls of the house, upon which were hung the owner's various firearms, and was itself bare, save for the precious casket by his side. If all else failed, the lad resolved to use the box as a weapon, and dashing it at the American, take his chance of the shot which

was sure to follow. The wind rose again, souging through the house, and Isaacs roused himself with a shiver from his musing.

“Horrid eerie sound that,” he remarked, with rather a forced laugh. “Oh yes, I was going to tell you about the lizard. Well, the first time I heard of the sultan’s jewels was at Hong-Kong six years ago. The whole East was ringing with the news of the theft, and day after day we expected to hear of the capture of the robbers. But time passed, the thieves were still at large, and at last the affair was forgotten by nearly every one. Two men in Hong-Kong, however, resolved to keep the lost treasure in mind: I was one, and Tsee Hing was the other. Tsee Hing was a well-known and influential Chinese merchant of the better class, ostensibly one of the most honest and respected citizens of Hong-Kong. Behind the scenes he was the owner of half the gambling and opium dens in the place, and a resetter of stolen gems. So wily were his methods, and in such awe was he held by his countrymen who came in contact with him, that for years he had carried on his illicit business undetected, under the very noses of the authorities. Quite by accident the old rascal’s crooked dealings had come to my knowledge, and in a manner I had him in my power. In return for my silence the Chinaman put—er—business in my way, and we

were on friendly terms, though I had to keep my weather eye open; for Tsee Hing was absolutely unscrupulous, and many a poor wretch who knew too much for his comfort disappeared mysteriously. We discussed the theft of the sultan's jewels together, and it was agreed that what the Dutch authorities had failed to do we should endeavour to accomplish—the profits to be divided equally between us. If any attempts were made to sell the jewels, Tsee Hing was the man to whom the thieves were bound to go, and he undertook to apprise me of the fact at once. In the meantime it was arranged that I should come to Lankat and endeavour to find a clue here on the spot; for the wily old Chinaman surmised—rightly, as it turned out—that things had been made so hot for the gang of robbers that the treasure had been buried. So I slipped over here, and left old Tsee Hing, no doubt, chuckling at the easy way in which he had fooled me; and he would have fooled me too if I hadn't known him so well."

The speaker paused to choose another cigar and light it from the stump of the old one, his right hand never relaxing its grip of the revolver. Even Gardner had become interested in the narrative; but at every pause Stanley racked his brain for a better scheme than that of using the jewel casket as a missile. The wind had risen to a stiff, squally breeze, and as a

sudden gust swept past it caused the lamp to flicker and the rug on the floor to stir and rise. In an instant the idea which he had tried in vain to grasp flashed across the lad's mind. Stretched in the middle of the veranda, unfastened, lay the rug, of which Gardner was very proud. He had brought it from Penang on his last trip, and it had been the cause of much good-humoured chaff on the part of his fellow-assistants. The outer edge lay under the boy's feet, the other lay within a yard of the partition against which Isaacs was leaning. Let the American advance but a pace and place both feet on the rug, and Stanley was resolved to put his plan into execution. A vigorous tug from their side would inevitably cause Isaacs to lose his balance, and Gardner could be trusted to do the rest. Linward's heart beat loudly as he took in the situation, and he averted his gaze lest some tell-tale expression should betray the thoughts that were passing in his mind.

"Yes, I guess Tsee Hing didn't reckon with Hiram K. Isaacs," went on that individual with a satisfied smile. "Before I vamoosed I took the precaution of bribing one of the rascal's most trusted men to keep me supplied with news of all the old man was up to in regard to this special business. Tsee Hing had saved this man from the gallows for ends of his own, and a more fitting servant for such a master could

not have been found. He was always open to the highest bidder, and I took care that the bribe I offered was not likely to be topped. This man's personal appearance, repulsive to start with, had been rendered still more hideous by a great scar across his face, which he had received in one of his numerous brawls. No need to describe him further, for you at least, Linward, have had the pleasure of meeting our friend—Mah Peng."

Mah Peng! His existence had been forgotten in the excitement and bewilderment of the last hour; but at the mention of his name the strangeness of the situation came over the lads, and involuntarily they looked at each other. By a lucky chance the Chinaman had been delivered into their hands; but no sooner had they themselves discovered the jewel box than Isaacs had appeared on the scene and compelled them to hand it over. Now, as fate would have it, these two rascals had been brought together practically under the same roof, though each as yet was unaware of the other's presence. If the American should chance to walk into the kitchen and discover his accomplice, there was no knowing what might happen. The situation was dramatic and full of exciting possibilities, the thought of which caused the two lads to exchange involuntarily a questioning glance. Isaacs looked sharply from one to the other,

and was about to speak when a sound fell on their ears. Faint and indistinct as it was, all present realized its significance. The storm was returning, heralded by a mighty rush of wind and rain.

"That is most unfortunate," remarked the American, displaying annoyance for the first time. "I had hoped to get away dry, but—it can't be helped. Well, to cut a long story short, I came over here as you know, and while staying with your uncle, Mr. Manson, made careful inquiries and investigations all round about this district. The oil claim was really only a pretext to get a footing with the sultan—and you will probably hear something about it from your uncle next time you meet."

He smiled at Stanley in a manner the latter failed to fathom at the moment, but remembered afterwards.

"From one or two native sources I learnt that on the night of the robbery a gang of desperadoes had been encountered making in this direction, but farther north they had not been seen. Shortly after I went to stay with the sultan I received word from Mah Peng that the sole survivor of the gang had at last appeared in Hong-Kong, and offered to sell the secret hiding-place of the treasure to Tsee Hing for a large sum of money, at the same time showing one of the stones as proof of his story. No agreement had been come to at the time the messenger left, but Mah Peng

hinted pretty plainly that his master was quietly preparing to have the informer seized and his secret extracted under torture. Not long afterwards a further messenger informed me that Tsee Hing was in possession of the secret, which he intended to make use of through a relation who was a partner in Swee Boo and Co. in Medan. Under torture the unhappy robber had revealed the burying-place of the jewels, explaining that the pursuit had been too close to enable them to dispose of their booty otherwise, and that, by quarrels amongst themselves and captures by the authorities, the band had gradually been reduced, until he himself was the only survivor who knew the exact resting-place of the iron box. Having got all he wanted, including the diamond, from the poor wretch, Tsee Hing at once disposed of him after his usual custom ; and Mah Peng announced that a secret messenger was being dispatched to Medan with a letter giving instructions for the finding of the chest, and that he himself would dog this messenger and get possession of the required information. He requested me to keep a watch on the boats sailing from Penang and Singapore, and be at the station in Medan when trains from Belawen arrived about the time he might be expected."

The American had to pause perforce, for the storm which they had heard in the distance now swept

down and struck the house with sudden violence, the wind shaking the doors and rattling the windows, while the rain fell in sheets on the leafy roof. The wind died away, but the torrential downpour continued; and as Isaacs resumed his tale he was compelled to raise his voice, and instinctively took a step towards his hearers. Stanley's muscles braced themselves for a supreme effort, and cautiously he inserted a shoe under the rug to ensure a good hold at the first attempt. But the time had not yet come: the American's right foot was still safely planted on the wooden flooring.

"When this little shower ceases I must leave you, gentlemen," he continued; "but I shouldn't be surprised if we have some first-class thunder and lightning shortly along with this. However, you may as well hear the rest of my story, though you know most of it already. Mah Peng missed his man on leaving Hong-Kong, but picked him up again on board the *Avagee* off Penang. During the night he attempted to steal the letter; but the bearer woke, and in the struggle was mortally stabbed, dying after he had managed to fling something overboard. Anticipating a search, Mah Peng concealed his weapon and the stolen letter in the merchandise of his neighbours on board, and they, for a small sum, undertook to swear that he had never left his place. When the

searchers withdrew he proceeded to read his letter, and at once perceived that all his trouble had been in vain unless he procured the mysterious 'lizard' to which Tsee Hing alluded. For that wily old heathen, while stating that the treasure was buried on Bekoeda, advised his correspondent to get a large outline map of the estate, and the exact spot would be revealed by the *chic-chac* he was sending separately for that purpose. Guessing that this must be the object his victim had dropped overboard, Mah Peng crept back to the scene of the murder—just in time to see our friend Stanley regain the deck with the lizard in his hand! His attempt on the cabin later on failed, as you know; and when we met at Medan station it was agreed that he should proceed to Bekoeda and procure the clue we needed. He followed you to your uncle's house, Linward; and after consultation with Ah Tjew it was arranged that while Mah Peng made an effort to get at the baggage which had been left at the station, the boy should search your clothes. Both plans failed, as did a deliberate attempt at shooting next day."

"Then it *was* Mah Peng who fired that shot?" exclaimed Stanley.

"Oh yes, it was Mah Peng, sure enough," answered Isaacs, with a careless smile; "and it was he, of course, who attacked you in the office shortly afterwards. Both attempts were without my knowledge or sanc-

tion ; but while I was staying in the house the wretch came to me again with the cheerful proposal that you should then and there be threatened with death unless you promised to hand over the lizard. As I had every hope of getting a glimpse of the *chic-chac* myself very soon, I rejected his proposed scheme and sent him away ; and that very night I have reason to believe he arranged with the boy Ah Tjew to fool me along with every one else. Perhaps you will remember the occasion, young fellow : you complained that our whispering had kept you awake."

Before Stanley could reply there came a vivid flash of lightning, accompanied by a deafening peal of thunder. As the roar died away into mutterings there came a second crash close at hand, and quite distinct. It sounded as though some irresistible force were smiting the jungle, tearing and rending the trees, and the very ground shook under the impact of a mighty blow.

"The *twalang*—the *twalang's* down !" cried Gardner. "We had better look out."

"I believe it was the *twalang*," echoed Isaacs, preparing to move—"you were just in time to locate the jewels. But now the old lightning-conductor is down, I'll be off: this place is unhealthy with thunderstorms about. Just to wind up, I must tell you that until the sultan lost the lizard I didn't

guess that Mah Peng was fooling me. As soon as possible I left Manson and the controller, and rode up here, to find the box myself or take it from the man who had it. Fate—and you—played into my hands, and—here we are. If it were safer, I would let you have a look at the colossal fortune you have just missed; but as things are, I must skip. You may wonder why I should tell you all this, but the fact is I would like Manson to know that I am not so ungrateful for his kindness to me as it has appeared. I knew all along that the oil claim would fail—why, you will find out later—but I had to fake up some excuse for hanging about this neighbourhood so long, and this came handiest. Now then!”

His tone took on the note of command, and Stanley felt that the crucial moment had come. He braced himself for the effort, and fixed his eyes on Isaacs. The American paused. A slight creak on the stairs caught his ear, and he stood alert, listening. Next second Stanley saw him step forward and throw up his revolver; but before the lad could put his plan into execution there came a blinding, white-hot, searing flash of flame, an ear-splitting, appalling crash, and he knew no more.

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How long Linward lay unconscious he could not have told; it might have been an hour, it might

have been several days. Slowly his senses crept back, and he became aware that some one was bending over him as he lay in a long chair, and he heard his uncle's voice saying, "Thank God, he is coming round all right." Slowly and wearily, as with an immense effort, he cast his eyes round, and his gaze fell on two white-clad forms lying on chairs.

"Gardner is getting better," said his uncle, noticing the direction of his glance. "The house was struck by lightning, and you have both had a wonderful escape. Isaacs the American is badly hurt, and it is a question whether he will ever recover."

Though oppressed with a sense of weakness and languor, Stanley was fast regaining command of his faculties, and gradually the events of the evening were piecing themselves together in his mind. Something was missing that he felt certain ought to have been there, but he could not remember what it was.

"That is Inspector Morris of the United States detective force," continued Mr. Manson, noting his nephew's puzzled look, and attributing it to the presence of the stranger. "He came up here with me to arrest Isaacs, who, it seems, is really a billiard-marker, and badly wanted for swindling and fraud in the States. Morris has just come over from Singapore, and happened to call on the controller while I was there with the Sultan of Lankat."

The sultan ! Of course that was what he had been looking for—the sultan's jewel casket. Stanley sat up and gazed wildly round.

"The jewels !" he gasped, seizing his uncle's arm.

"What jewels ?" asked Mr. Manson soothingly, fearing that the lad's wits were wandering.

"The sultan's jewels !" reiterated Stanley excitedly. "We found the iron box under the *twalang*, and carried it into the house. There"—he pointed to the table as he spoke—"we put it there, and it was beside me when the flash came. Where have you put it ?"

Mr. Manson and Inspector Morris gazed at each other blankly.

"I do not remember seeing it," said the former slowly, while the inspector shook his head.

The jewel case had vanished !

CHAPTER XII.

THE END OF MAH PENG.

THE jewels had vanished! There could be no doubt of it, and only one man could have taken them—Mah Peng! It all came back to Stanley with a rush—the creak on the stairs, the revolver levelled at some one behind them, and then that awful, blinding flash. As rapidly as possible he explained the situation to his uncle, and Inspector Morris at once volunteered to go round to the back and find out the true state of affairs. While he was gone, Gardner stirred and opened his eyes.

“Hullo! Where am I?” he asked weakly, gazing round.

“In your own house on Road VI.,” answered Mr. Manson. “Lie quiet for a little, and you will feel better.”

Stanley essayed to rise and go to his friend, but his legs shook and his head swam, and he was compelled to fall back again into his chair. A minute later the Yankee detective entered, and in a sentence confirmed their fears.

"The Chinese boy is dead drunk with opium," he announced laconically, "and the prisoner's gone."

"What prisoner?" asked Gardner, looking from one to the other.

"Mah Peng," said Stanley, with a groan. "He's got away after all, and taken the jewel box with him."

Gardner thumped the arm of his chair feebly.

"I remember. I'll thrash that boy of mine," he cried; "I told him I would, and I'll keep my word. But did that beast Isaacs get away too? I can't recollect anything after that terrible flash."

"Hush!" said Mr. Manson, drawing his attention to the silent figure lying huddled in a chair at the other end of the room. "Isaacs did not get off. He will trouble none of us any more."

"Is he dead?" asked Gardner, in an awed whisper.

"No," was the reply; "but his face is terribly scorched, and we fear his eyesight may be permanently destroyed. He is still unconscious, and must have been standing close to the beam which the lightning struck: it is a mercy that you two were farther off. If it had not been for the heavy rain, probably the whole house would have been burnt. We were turning in from the main road when the flash came, and Morris said he was sure the house was struck. It gave me a queer turn to find you all lying about the floor, I can tell you."

"The carriage is ready," announced the detective, interrupting. "Can you give me something to wrap round Isaacs?"

"Take my rug," said Gardner; "you'll find it on a chair in my room. Where are you taking him to?"

"Straight to Bindjei hospital," replied Mr. Manson, as the inspector returned with the rug.—"You had better go on to the controller's afterwards, Morris, and report this affair of the jewels."

"I guess. Give me a description of the man and the stolen goods;" and his notebook was out instantly.

"No need to describe the booty," said Mr. Manson, with a dry laugh—"it is well enough known already. Have you never heard of the Sultan of Lankat's jewels?"

Inspector Morris whistled. "You don't mean—"

"That these are the same jewels? That is just what I do mean. As to the man—my nephew will describe him for you."

Stanley did so, briefly, and the detective shut his notebook with a confident air.

"That scar on the face fixes him," he remarked grimly, "and he can't get far to-night with that iron box, wounded as he is. If the Dutchies are up to their business they should nab him—sure thing."

"I'm not so certain of that," remarked Mr. Manson

doubtfully. "These fellows possess an extraordinary amount of vitality, and recover from an injury with surprising quickness. Besides that, a country with jungle like this is not easily searched, and this Mah Peng is wily even for a Chinaman."

Without further reply Inspector Morris wrapped the rug round the injured man, and lifted him as easily as a child.

"Quite unconscious still," he remarked; "no fear of him escaping."

He carried his burden down the steps, and placing him in the carriage got in himself.

"Tell Dr. Lipsham to come up here first thing to-morrow morning," called Mr. Manson from the window. "I'll be down in Bindjei in the afternoon, and hear your news. Good-night."

The carriage drove off, and the two lads listened to the sound of the retreating wheels with mingled feelings. In spite of Isaacs' barefaced confession of villainy, they could not refrain from a feeling of sympathy with him in his terrible misfortune. The spoils of years of scheming had been carried off from under his very nose in the hour of triumph, while he himself, struck down in the prime of life, would recover—if, indeed, he ever recovered at all—only to be tried and thrown into prison. Truly his plight was pitiable in the extreme.

Mr. Manson turned from the window. "Now," he said briskly, addressing the two lads, "you must get away to bed as fast as you can, and have a good rest. You needn't worry about getting up in the morning, Gardner. I'll take a turn round your division myself, and see that everything is in order. I want Dr. Lipsham to overhaul you both before you begin work again."

"It's awfully good of you, sir," said Gardner gratefully. "I do feel rather queer, though no doubt we are lucky to have any feelings at all after being struck with lightning! By-the-bye, where have you put Mike's body?"

"In a box under the house. Poor Mike! Stanley told us how he died doing his duty, and we'll give him a fitting burial to-morrow. Now come along."

With the manager's assistance the two lads managed to reach their beds, and so weak and dizzy did they feel with the effort that they were glad to lay their heads on the pillows and lie quiet. When they were comfortably settled, Mr. Manson paid a visit to the kitchen, where he found the Chinese boy still in a stupor, and quite incapable of attending to his duties. The manager, however, had been too long in the East to be put out at such an occurrence, and after a little foraging, obtained for himself a substantial repast, consisting mainly

of tinned provisions and fruit. Having fastened the doors and assured himself that Gardner and Stanley were comfortable, he settled down in a long chair and was soon fast asleep.

The night passed quietly, and next morning early Mr. Manson was up, and after a look at the two lads, who were sleeping uneasily, he strolled round the division and superintended the work of the coolies. On his return he met Dr. Lipsham coming out of the house, and at once accosted him.

"Good-morning, doctor. It's very kind of you coming up so early. How are the patients? Are there likely to be any bad effects? Cases of lightning stroke are rather out of my medical experience."

"No wonder," chuckled the doctor—"patients who have been struck by lightning in this country are generally quite beyond any man's medical aid; but, speaking seriously, they are as well as can be expected. There is a slight touch of fever in Gardner's case; but beyond a severe shock there is nothing else amiss, and a few days' rest should put them all right again till the next time. That nephew of yours seems to have the knack of getting into trouble. First stabbed and then struck by lightning; there's no saying what he'll be up to next."

"I am immensely glad to hear your verdict," replied Mr. Manson, with a sigh of relief, "and will

see that they get a good rest. With your permission, I'll take them both down to my house after breakfast."

"By all means—a change will do them good. Shall I give your syce word as I drive down?"

"Thanks; that will be the best plan. Now tell me how that poor wretch Isaacs is. I suppose Morris got him safely down to the hospital last night?"

"A bad case, a bad case," replied Dr. Lipsham, shaking his head. "He may recover to a certain extent, but his eyesight is quite gone. These two boys must have had a wonderful escape, it seems."

"Most providential."

"That fellow Morris gave me an account of all that happened—tigers and wounded coolies, thunderstorms, brigands and treasure, all mixed up, so that I could hardly follow the business at all. He said he had to go to the controller about the sultan or somebody, and went off like a streak, leaving Isaacs on my hands. Let's get some breakfast, and you can tell me the whole story again."

Mr. Manson assented readily, and in answer to his call the Chinese boy appeared, shamefaced, heavy-eyed, and stupid.

"Umph!" commented Dr. Lipsham, after one look, "opium. He needs my attention more than these healthy young fellows upstairs."

Mr. Manson saw that the Chinaman was not in a fit state to be lectured, and contented himself with a short, stern reproof for his behaviour the previous evening—behaviour through which he himself and the Englishmen might have lost their lives. The wretched boy crawled away to prepare breakfast, and the manager turned to his companion with a laugh.

“I expect Gardner will take it out of him when he gets about again. But come along now, and I’ll explain everything to you.”

Dr. Lipsham listened with great interest while the events of the previous evening were detailed to him, along with the story of Stanley’s discovery of the key to the secret of the jewelled lizard.

“That nephew of yours is a smart fellow,” he exclaimed at last, thumping the table; “but for him either Isaacs or that scoundrel Mah Peng would certainly have scooped the pool. They ought to catch that Chinaman. How will all this affect your relations to the sultan with regard to the estate?”

“I was just coming to that,” replied Mr. Manson quietly, lighting his pipe, “though no doubt you have heard part of it from Morris. As arranged, the sultan and I were talking the matter over with the controller yesterday afternoon, when one of the servants brought me a letter which Stanley had forwarded from Bekoeda. It was marked *urgent*,

and came from Guntzell and Turnbull in Singapore, the firm of experts I had employed to analyze the soil with reference to this oil claim."

Dr. Lipsham nodded.

"They stated that they had just discovered that the samples of soil sent them had been tampered with in transmission and cleverly treated with petroleum. Under these circumstances they proposed to send over one of their own men to make investigations on the spot, and asked me to wire further instructions. In Stanley's note which accompanied this letter, he announced that, just as our carriage left Bekoeda, he had recognized Isaacs as the man he had seen conversing with Mah Peng at Medan station the day he arrived."

"What a scoundrel the fellow must have been!"

"Isaacs made some excuse to leave the room as the servant entered, and I fancy now that he had caught sight of the letter, and twigged that the game was up. As you may imagine, I laid the facts before the controller at once, and demanded that proceedings should be stayed. The American was sent for, and while we were waiting for his return Inspector Morris arrived with a warrant for the fellow's arrest, on a charge of extensive fraud and swindling in the States."

"Yes; Morris told me so much himself last night."

"When the sultan realized how he had been fooled he was perfectly furious, and it was just as well for Isaacs that he had got clear in time. When it was reported that he was not to be found anywhere, I left at once and drove up here, guessing from Stanley's note what his objective was like to be. Luckily, as you know, Morris and I arrived in the nick of time, and no doubt our coming prevented Mah Peng from putting into execution any little scheme of vengeance he may have contemplated."

"Then I may congratulate you on keeping the estate," said the doctor heartily, rising and holding out his hand. "All your friends will be delighted at the result, and no one more so than myself."

They shook hands cordially just as the syce brought round the buggy to the door.

"All's well that ends well, you know," said Dr. Lipsham, stepping into the trap, "but I wish your nephew had managed to bag the treasure after all his exciting experiences. It seems to me you owe most of your good luck to him. Keep him on a milk diet," he chuckled as he drove off, "or he'll be wanting to join in the chase after that Chinese rascal."

Mr. Manson paid a visit to the two patients, and was glad to find them as well as could be expected. Stanley, indeed, as Dr. Lipsham had predicted, was

eager to join in the chase after Mah Peng, but his uncle refused to hear of such a thing for a day or two at least. Gardner seemed to be feeling the effects of the shock more than his younger comrade, and his thoughts dwelt on the loss of his faithful terrier rather than on the recovery of the jewels. He begged Mr. Manson to see that poor Mike received decent burial, and this his manager undertook to do at once. Calling the boy he ordered him to bring a *chancol*, and selecting a suitable spot at the back of the house, set him to dig a grave. And here Mike was buried, with a stout post driven into the ground to mark his last resting-place. Shortly after this task was completed the Bekoeda carriage drove up, and Gardner, who still felt very shaky, was assisted into it. Stanley, who disdained any help, was loth to leave without taking the tiger skin with him; but this was found to be impossible owing to the state of terror into which the horses were driven when the hide was brought anywhere near them.

Eventually it was decided that the trophy should remain on Road VI. for the present, and the little party drove off.

"Do you notice any difference in the landscape?" Mr. Manson asked Gardner, as they crossed the wooden bridge and turned into the road.

"Any difference!" repeated the lad wonderingly,

as he gazed about him. "What do you mean? Why—yes—where—the *twalang's* down, of course! Look, Stanley, it has disappeared completely. If you hadn't guessed the riddle of the lizard yesterday—"

"And much good it has done us," interrupted Linward petulantly. "That blackguard Mah Peng might just as well have found it straight away. But, I say, what a crash it must have come. See how it has smashed all the trees round about in its fall."

"Yes," said Mr. Manson quietly, as they reached the main road. "You ought to be thankful it was not struck while you were digging underneath it. You have indeed had a marvellous series of escapes; and I also have had my share," he added, with a smile.

"You, Uncle Ralph!" exclaimed Stanley. "What do you mean?"

Mr. Manson, in reply, proceeded to tell them of the collapse of the claim against the estate; and from the intense relief in his tone his hearers were able to guess something of the terrible strain he had endured pending the settlement of the case. His nephew had a dozen questions to ask before he understood what an important part the Singapore letter which he had forwarded had played in the matter, and even then he appeared only half satisfied.

"I'm awfully glad, Uncle Ralph," he said at last. "It's really splendid; but, you know—I did want to

win back Bekoeda for you myself with the sultan's jewels!"

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, my dear boy," laughed Mr. Manson, as they turned into the avenue of cocoanut trees and drove up to the house, "but you mustn't worry about that any more. I mean to see that all my assistants who have stuck by me so loyally share in my good fortune. I have decided to give Macandrew a year's trip home very shortly, and in his absence you, Gardner, will be promoted head-assistant. As that entails engaging another assistant, I mean to offer the post to Stanley Linward."

The carriage drew up under the porch as he finished speaking, and jumping out he cut short the lads' delighted expressions of thanks by hurrying them both upstairs to their rooms, where, in spite of indignant protests, they were ordered to remain for the rest of the day.

"Doctor's orders must be obeyed," was Mr. Manson's only reply; and the rebels had to give in with as good grace as possible.

The manager himself, after tiffin, drove down to Bindjei, and did not return till six o'clock, when Dr. Lipsham accompanied him. The latter found his two patients much refreshed by a good afternoon's sleep, and after a short interview pronounced Stanley quite fit again.

"But there must be another day's rest," he added quickly, anticipating the boy's exuberant expressions of relief, "and I think it would be as well if you kept your friend company in his milk diet. I am glad to find you have shaken off that touch of fever, Gardner, but you must keep out of the sun for a day or two longer."

"Milk diet!" cried Stanley; "why, I could eat an ox!"

"Perhaps you could," retorted the doctor, "but you won't get the chance. Now I must be off. Restrain your impatience for another day, Linward, and then I wash my hands of you and your treasure-hunting. Your uncle has something to tell you when he comes up from the office. Good-night."

Stanley waited restlessly until the manager stopped work for the day, and on his appearance greeted him with a torrent of questions.

"One at a time, please," laughed Mr. Manson, holding his hands over his ears. "If you will let me have an innings you will hear all my news. First of all, Dr. Lipsham has given me his report on you both, and strict orders as to low diet for another day."

Stanley groaned, and Gardner burst out laughing at his wry expression.

"After that," went on Mr. Manson, "you are both discharged as fit, but Gardner is recommended to

stay in the house out of the sun for a day or two. So far for the doctor's report. Now as to the rest of my news. As you know, I went down to Bindjei to see the controller and tell him of your discovery of the treasure, and Mah Peng's subsequent flight with the jewel box. The controller, it seems, on hearing from Morris, had taken prompt measures to capture the thief. The sultan also had been notified at once, and had sent out his retainers to assist in the search, but up to the present there has been no trace of the fugitive. The controller was very anxious to see you lads and hear the story from your own lips, but when he heard of your accident he agreed to postpone the interview until the day after to-morrow, when I have promised to drive you down to his house, Stanley. The sultan will be there, and you will be able at least to hand back to him the jewelled lizard."

"And may I go and help to catch Mah Peng?" asked his nephew eagerly.

"No, certainly not," was the response. "You have had enough treasure-hunting to last you a lifetime; and, besides, I don't like my assistants to neglect their work."

The recollection of the promotion he had received—the attainment of his great ambition to become a real planter—atoned somewhat for the disappointment at the thought that, after all, he would not be the

lucky individual who should restore the jewels to the sultan.

The next day passed quietly, and in the evening Macandrew and Menzies came down to inquire for their friends, and, on Mr. Manson's invitation, stayed to dinner. In the course of the meal the manager made known the plans which he had already confided to the others, and there was much mutual congratulation—Stanley's health, as the new assistant, being drunk with great enthusiasm.

The next morning after breakfast the carriage came round, and after the jewelled lizard had been taken from its resting-place in the safe and transferred to Mr. Manson's pocket, the manager and his nephew took their seats, and with a farewell wave of the hand to Gardner started for Bindjei.

It was the first time Stanley had been off the estate since his arrival, and he gazed around him with interest as they drove through the little native *kampongs*, or passed coolies trotting along the road with their great baskets slung on a stick across their shoulders. They came at length to the banks of a broad stream; the carriage drew up, and Mr. Manson alighted.

"Come along, Stanley," he said. "We have to cross a ferry here, and the syce must take the horses out. That young chestnut is new to the country, and gets very restive."

Linward followed his uncle to the landing-place, where he found a group of natives and coolies waiting to be ferried over. A thick wire rope was stretched across the river a short distance up-stream, and to this was attached a big raft, which was propelled backwards and forwards by the Chinese boatmen. The carriage was pulled on board by the coolies; and the horses, not without some difficulty, having been induced to follow, the boatmen shoved off. The natives sat on their haunches stolidly waiting till they should reach the other side, but Stanley felt some misgivings as the crazy old raft swung into mid-stream and the wire rope sagged with the weight. He was astonished, too, at the strength of the current, which raced past at a great rate.

"A nasty spot this for any one to fall overboard," remarked Mr. Manson. "He would be swept between these high cliffs in a moment, and if he wasn't drowned the crocodiles would soon settle him."

"Crocodiles! Are there many in this river?"

"Swarms of them," replied the manager. "Do you see that brown patch like a log lying on the water close to the cliff? If I am not mistaken that is a crocodile, and a big one, waiting for anything that luck may throw in his way."

Stanley shuddered at the thought, and felt much relieved when the raft swung into the opposite bank

and he stepped on dry land once more. The carriage was pulled ashore, the horses landed, and the raft started on its return journey with another batch of natives. The controller's house was less than a mile away, but try as he would the syce could not manage to yoke the horses. Coaxing and commands were alike of no avail, for the young chestnut seemed thoroughly out of hand, and its restlessness affected its fellow.

"It is no use, *tuan*," said the man at last. "I cannot manage the two horses myself; but when the boat comes again I shall get some one to help me."

By this time the raft had started again on its return journey, and Stanley stood watching as it swung across the stream. There were no Europeans on board, and only some half-dozen natives besides the boatmen. Two Chinese coolies with their big baskets of fruit at their side crouched on the planks with their enormous slouch hats pulled over their eyes for the sun, and even at that distance the strong smell of the durians was unpleasantly pronounced. Linward was wondering idly how any one could wish to eat such a fruit, when a movement on the part of one of the coolies attracted his attention. As the raft swung close in the man looked up quickly, then with a hurried gesture appeared to pull his hat farther over his face. Somewhat surprised, Stanley

was turning away indifferently when he stopped short, as if spellbound. The coolie, whose back was now towards him, stooped to pick up his baskets, and the lad noticed with a thrill of excitement that his left arm seemed stiff, and was scored with several fresh wounds. The fellow looked round again with a furtive air, and next second, with a shout of "Mah Peng!" Stanley took a running leap and landed on the raft.

Instantly all was confusion. Startled by the cry, the boatmen relaxed their efforts, to ascertain the cause, and the raft was instantly swept back from the shore. The natives scattered as the English lad landed amongst them, but the bigger of the Chinese coolies stood his ground, a long knife suddenly flashing in his hand, and the lust of battle gleaming in his slanting eyes.

"Steady, my boy, steady!" cried Mr. Manson, noting the man's attitude. "The fellow's armed and desperate—take care!"

"All right," cried Stanley, recovering his balance; "I'll watch him, never fear."

Mah Peng, for it was he, realized that the game was up; but before surrendering, he would kill the young "foreign devil" who had thwarted him at every step. Crouching low, like some wild animal at bay, his evil face all ablaze with hate and fury, he faced his pursuer.

But Stanley's British blood was up, and the thought of danger hardly crossed his mind. Here before him at last stood the scoundrel who had twice attempted to murder him, and who had actually stabbed to death two of his own countrymen. The lad's eyes sparkled with the joy of battle as he faced his treacherous antagonist, alert for the expected attack.

Suddenly it came. Stealthily, quickly, Mah Peng glided forward a few paces, and with a hoarse snarl of hate flung himself bodily at his foe. So rapid was his action that Stanley had barely time to dodge the vicious lunge of the long knife when his throat was seized in a grip which once before had nigh proved fatal. But this time the lad was prepared, and swinging round his left fist he caught the Chinaman a blow on the jaw that sent him staggering back. Like a flash the English lad was on him, and ere he could regain his balance the knife was sent spinning out of his hand, and he in turn found himself gripped by a pair of lusty young arms. Mah Peng struggled like a wild cat. He bit and scratched, twisted and turned, but all to no purpose. The boatmen had recovered their wits by this time, and the raft was close to the shore, when suddenly, and in an unexpected manner, the struggle came to an end. In their conflict the two combatants had

staggered to the very edge of the planks, and quick as thought the wily Chinaman saw his chance. With a sudden desperate effort he pulled Stanley forward, and then, with a quick jerk, sent him reeling against the baskets lying just behind. The lad strove for an instant to recover his balance, and then fell backwards with a crash, dragging his enemy with him. For a moment the boy's head hung over the swirling water; then he heard a shout, and a strong hand seized him and pulled him to his feet.

"Mah Peng!" he gasped, gazing wildly round, fearing that the cunning Asiatic had escaped after all.

"Mah Peng fell overboard when you let go your hold of him," said Mr. Manson, his rescuer, pointing down the river. "Look, there he is battling for his life. No, no, it is useless going in after him: it is certain death in that current."

Stanley's impulse had been to jump in and secure his captive, but his uncle's words made him pause. He looked after the dark head bobbing on the swirling waters, and realized that the idea was madness. Already Mah Peng was some distance away, and every second was carrying him farther. Suddenly, as they watched, a back eddy seemed to catch the drowning man and sweep him towards the nearest cliff.

"By Jove! I believe he'll escape after all," ex-

claimed Mr. Manson, "unless these native policemen manage to capture him." He pointed as he spoke to two Javanese in uniform who were making their way along the bank to the spot towards which the Chinaman was drifting. The race for life had become intensely exciting, but another pursuer suddenly appeared and turned the odds against the fugitive. A loud splash on the other side of the river attracted Stanley's attention.

"The crocodile, Uncle Ralph—the crocodile is after him!"

Instinctively Mah Peng appeared to divine his danger, and commenced to make desperate efforts to gain the shore. Already he was out of the eddy and in quiet water; a moment later and he brushed against the cliff. He strove frantically to gain a hold with his hand, but failed, until a stunted tree growing out of the sandy rock gave him his opportunity. He grasped a projecting bough, and for a moment stayed his progress, then proceeded to haul himself on to the land. The onlookers saw him jerk his feet clear of the water just as a pair of huge jaws rose hungrily with a vicious snap. The crocodile had lost its prey! Even Stanley could scarcely refrain from cheering; but next moment a thrill of horror ran through him. The Chinaman was falling back! The tree was giving way! Slowly but

surely it bent forward and downward, and the spectators held their breath as they gazed. Lower and lower bent the tree, and the great, loathsome monster in the water opened its jaws again in anticipation. And thus he went, slowly to his doom. The victim swung half round, and Stanley saw for the last time his evil, terror-stricken face. The eyes were starting in horror, and the weal of the disfiguring scar stood out across the livid pallor of the cheeks. The lad turned away his head as an awful, despairing shriek came from the doomed wretch, and when he looked again only a swirl in the water marked the spot where Mah Peng met his terrible fate.

CHAPTER XIII.

SAFE AT LAST.

FOR some moments both uncle and nephew stood speechless, overcome with horror at the grim tragedy they had just witnessed, and unable to remove their eyes from the spot where the body of Mah Peng had disappeared beneath the rushing waters of the stream. Mr. Manson was the first to recover himself.

"Come away, my boy," he said hoarsely, turning on his heel; "the poor wretch has met his end. Good heavens, what a fate!"

Shaken and all of a tremble, Stanley prepared to follow his uncle, when his eye fell on the baskets at his feet. His desperate encounter with the robber and the Chinaman's subsequent appalling fate had driven the thought of the treasure out of his head for the time, but now an idea struck him.

"I say, Uncle Ralph, these are Mah Peng's baskets. Perhaps he hid the stolen jewels in them!" he cried excitedly, at the same time stooping to examine the contents.

"You may be right," replied Mr. Manson. "It is quite possible he hid something there, but we can take them with us and have a look as we go along. We can hand them over to the police, at any rate; but let's get away from this place. That poor wretch's scream is still ringing in my ears, and we have kept the controller waiting long enough. I see that Hassan has got the horses yoked at last."

Carrying the two baskets, they entered the carriage and drove off towards Bindjei; and as they passed through the village, the sight of two Europeans each with a coolie's basket of fruit on his knee caused no little wonder and amazement amongst the native inhabitants.

"There seems to be no iron box or jewels here," remarked Mr. Manson, after a hasty search. "I have turned over all the fruit, and come upon nothing of value. Some of the fruit even seems to be old and stale, and I'm afraid that any gems Mah Peng was carrying have disappeared for ever along with him. Ugh, what a fate!" and he shuddered again, with the recent tragedy fresh in his mind.

"There's nothing here either," responded Stanley dolefully. "I've been to the very bottom, and my hands smell of these beastly durians."

"Here we are," announced Mr. Manson a minute later, as the syce turned into an avenue and drew

up before a long, low house. "We can leave these baskets in the carriage for the present, in case the sultan wishes to examine them for himself, which is hardly probable. What with your rough-and-tumble scrimmage on the raft and the basket on your knee, you certainly don't look very clean or presentable, but it can't be helped now. Come along."

He stepped out of the carriage and ran up the steps, and Stanley jumped out after him. In doing so he happened to brush against one of the baskets, and a small pineapple fell out on to the ground. He stooped to pick it up, and as he did so something appeared to attract his attention. A moment later he was racing after Mr. Manson with the fruit in his hand. His uncle had already been shown into the house by the Chinese boy, and before Linward could overtake him the door at the end of the veranda was thrown open and the controller appeared.

"Ah, Mynheer Manson," he said, speaking in English, "you have come at last. We began to fear you were not to come. Have you your nephew brought?"

"I must apologize for keeping you waiting," replied Mr. Manson, shaking hands, "and I shall explain the reason just now. Yes, my nephew is here;" and he turned to introduce Stanley.

"Ach, this is your nephew! Pardon, I do not understand," said the Dutchman, eyeing with some

amazement the bedraggled figure in front of him. "You are welcome, Mynheer Linward. Will you please come in with your uncle?"

Stanley bowed and followed Mr. Manson, who was already shaking hands with the sultan. The latter greeted the lad warmly, and was proceeding to pour forth a torrent of questions concerning his jewels, when Mr. Manson interrupted him.

"Excuse me, Tunko Sultan," he began, "but I have some news which the tuan controller should hear at once. Mah Peng, the Chinaman who stole the jewels, is dead. My nephew recognized him crossing the ferry disguised as a coolie carrying fruit, and after a desperate struggle he fell into the river and was carried off by a crocodile. We witnessed the whole awful tragedy."

"Mah Peng dead!" ejaculated the controller.

"The robber killed!" echoed the sultan, gazing from one to another. "Then you have recovered my jewels?"

Stanley was about to speak, when his uncle forestalled him.

"No, I regret to say we did not recover your treasure, Tunko Sultan," he announced. "We searched the baskets for the casket or the jewels, but found nothing. We have, however, brought the jewelled lizard, which my nephew took from Mah Peng up on Road VI."

So saying, he took the little *chic-chac* from his pocket and handed it to the sultan. The latter received it in silence, evidently much disappointed at the sudden dashing of the hopes which he had entertained.

"But these baskets of fruit," broke in the controller, a small man with spectacles; "you are sure there is nothing concealed in them? Your nephew, I see, has been sampling the pineapples." He smiled as he spoke, and Mr. Manson could scarcely conceal his annoyance.

"The baskets are outside in my carriage, if you care to examine them," he answered shortly. "We searched hurriedly as we came along, but I can assure you there is nothing in them but the fruit."

"But there *is* something more in them, Uncle Ralph!" burst out Stanley excitedly, unable to contain himself any longer—"there *is* something more in them, though Mah Peng nearly fooled us after all."

Stepping up to the sultan as he spoke, the lad offered him the pineapple; but the Mohammedan drew back with the instinct of his religion.

"Look here, then!" cried Linward to the others, who were gazing at him in astonishment.

Turning to a table close by, he pulled out the head of the pineapple and gave the fruit a vigorous shake. A cry of wonder and amazement burst from his companions as a finely-chased necklace of gold dropped

out, followed by what seemed a perfect torrent of glittering gems.

“My jewels!” exclaimed the sultan with delight, stepping forward and picking up the stones lovingly — “my jewels at last! Where are the baskets? The rest may be there.”

The controller called to a servant to bring them in, and when this had been done the fellow withdrew, leaving the three Europeans preparing to examine the fruit. It was a strange sight to see the controller with an evil-smelling durian on his knee, feeling it all over to ascertain whether it had been opened before, and probing it to test if it contained any valuables. Fruit after fruit yielded up its unusual contents, and when the last mangosteen had been split open and thrown aside there was a small pile of glittering jewels on the table. Diamonds and sapphires, rubies and emeralds, each worth a king's ransom, lay scattered amongst priceless pearls and beautiful amethysts. The sultan told them over one by one carefully and lovingly, while the others looked on in speechless admiration.

“How on earth did you guess that these stones were hidden in the fruit?” asked Mr. Manson at length, turning to his nephew.

Stanley laughed. “It was no guess on my part,” he said, “but a pure accident. As I got out of the

carriage to follow you I knocked the pineapple out of one of the baskets, and when I stooped to pick it up I saw something shining. On looking closer I discovered that the head of the fruit had been cut out and the inside filled up. The head had become loosened with the fall, and a link of that gold chain was sticking out; and I realized in a flash how Mah Peng had hoped to fool us."

"Wonderful! it is wonderful!" repeated the controller. "And to think that this wealth has been lying hidden on your estate all these years and you never guessed it!"

"And to think that it has been waiting there for you to find and you have never found it!" retorted Mr. Manson, smiling. "Even now it would have been taken out of the country under your very nose if my nephew hadn't spotted it."

"Ach, that is so," laughed the Dutchman. "Your nephew seems to have a nose for treasure."

The little man was well pleased with himself. Now that the sultan had recovered his treasure there was little fear that he would enter into an alliance with the Achinese. It would be his pleasant duty to acquaint the Home Government with this fact, and a step upward would probably result from his "successful diplomacy."

"Tuan Controller," began the sultan slowly, when

he had at length finished inspecting his recovered treasure, "Tuan Controller, I have gone over these jewels, and find that most of the large and valuable stones are here. A few are missing—two or three million dollars or so—but that is nothing. Will you now take charge of these for me until I have a strong room built ready for them?"

"Certainly, certainly, with pleasure," replied the controller fussily. "I'll put them alongside my official papers—they will be quite safe there." He produced a key as he spoke and moved towards the door.

"Wait a little, please," went on the sultan. "I wish to thank you very much for the trouble you have taken and the help you have given, and I shall ask you to forward a letter from me to the rulers in Holland expressing my gratitude."

The little Dutchman beamed all over.

"To you," continued the sultan, turning to Stanley, "to you I owe my fortune, and I have not forgotten my promise. Bekoeda is already safe to your uncle in spite of the wicked plot of the Tuan Isaacs and my madness in listening to it. But choose now what you will from these gems as a mark of my gratitude."

He waved his hand carelessly towards the glittering heap on the table, and Stanley fairly gasped at the dazzling offer. Now that his dream had come true he hardly knew what to do. His one idea throughout

had been to redeem his uncle's estate; and now that this was accomplished he did not like to accept what would seem like payment for his services. Seeing him hesitate, the sultan spread out the flashing gems so that he might make his choice, but the lad shook his head.

"They are splendid," he said, in genuine admiration, "but I could not think of taking any. Might—might I keep the jewelled lizard as a sort of memento?"

When the sultan understood what the lad wished he presented him with the little *chic-chac* at once, and begged him to make a selection from the other gems also. On Stanley declining again, he appealed to Mr. Manson to second his request.

"I really think you will have to accept something, my boy," said the latter in English, "or his highness may take offence. After all, he owes his whole fortune to you, as he says, and it is only natural that he should wish to show his gratitude."

Thus urged the lad at last gave way, and requested the sultan to choose two small jewels which he might send to his mother and sister.

The sultan complied at once, picking out three of the most valuable gems—a ruby, a diamond, and an emerald—asking Linward to accept them for himself as well as for his mother and sister, with his most

grateful thanks. After a further interchange of courtesies, Mr. Manson and his nephew took their leave and drove off on their return to the estate.

"Well, Stanley," said his uncle, as they approached Bekoeda, "your lizard has brought us good luck after all."

"Indeed it has, Uncle Ralph," replied the lad; "and now I shall be able to provide for mother and Agnes. I can hardly believe that I am not dreaming."

Gardner was eagerly awaiting their return, and his delight and satisfaction at the good news knew no bounds. The tale of Mah Peng's awful fate and the ultimate finding of the long-lost jewels had to be gone over again, and Stanley's gifts were produced for inspection and admiration.

"What will Menzies say now, I wonder?" chuckled Gardner, when the gems had been carefully deposited in the safe and the trio were seated at dinner. "Do you remember how he insisted that the *chic-chac* was only a joss and the diamond a fraud? A lucky joss for you, Stanley, anyway, old chap. What on earth are you going to do with your fabulous wealth?"

This was a question not to be lightly settled, and Stanley had several lengthy consultations with his uncle on the subject. Now that his own future was assured, Mr. Manson had no hesitation in advising

his nephew to adopt planting as a career, and offered to start him on a small neighbouring estate as soon as he felt qualified for the charge. With this prospect before him, Stanley decided that the best way to utilize the sultan's gifts was to turn them into hard cash for the benefit of his mother and sister. His uncle thoroughly approved of the idea, and so the matter was finally settled. Macandrew was entrusted with the commission; and when he reached England shortly afterwards he had an important consultation with Mr. Oliver the old lawyer, with the result that Mrs. Linward and her daughter were told one fine day that a beautiful cottage near their old home had been bought for them by Stanley, and that a comfortable sum was at their disposal in the bank.

Macandrew was a frequent and welcome guest at Ivy Cottage, and on his return to Sumatra confided to Stanley that the two things Mrs. Linward valued most in her new home were a certain tiger skin and a valuable little curio which she showed to her favoured guests, at the same time telling the story of the "Jewelled Lizard."

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